

## Hart and Hind

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## Hart and Hind

by [wrennette](#)

### Summary

In Seventh year DADA, the NEWT level students are learning the *Patronus* charm. When Severus Snape produces a hind, and James Potter a hart, James begins looking on the combative Slytherin in a different light.

### Notes

I have a few completed chapters that I'm happy with, and will be posting weekly as motivation to get myself to finish this. I make no promises as to the regularity of my updating after the completed chapters are up. This isn't my usual ship, and I'm feeling through how to make it work for me as I go.

for visuals, this is my James (I don't know the models name, sorry):



Jan Uddin is my Severus (although Severus doesn't have facial hair):



and Renee Mittelstaedt is my Lily:



See the end of the work for more [notes](#)



# A Shadow in the Mist

## Chapter Notes

In this chapter, slurs for Rromani and Iberian people are used when discussing Severus' ethnicity. This doesn't reflect the author's personal views, but is an expression of racism that Severus might have experienced, and possibly internalized, growing up brown and poor. I haven't set the words off in any manner or warned for them in the flow of the text, so if you think they will bother you, this is your warning.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

*Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.*  
~Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

"*Expecto Patronum*," a soft, low voice said firmly, and James adjusted the hood of his invisibility cloak to ensure it covered his wild black hair and medium brown skin completely, peering into the almost abandoned classroom. An amorphous silvery mist filled the room, and at its center stood a slender black robed figure. The *patronus* mist disguised the figure's identity, obscuring the body shape in its softly glowing light.

It was another wizard, James was certain of that from the timbre of the rich baritone voice. And the voice had been familiar, although James couldn't quite place it. He crouched through the doorway as close to silently as possible. It was said that a corporeal *patronus* automatically increased your NEWT score by one grade level. James had known he wasn't the only one practicing the difficult charm, although the professor wouldn't even be mentioning it in class for some weeks yet. The other wizard sighed softly.

"I'm never going to get this," the shadowy figure sighed, almost too quiet for James to hear. Despite the defeat in the tone, the figure raised his wand again. "*Expecto Patronum*," he again incanted firmly, and again the room was illuminated with silvery mist. It was rather beautiful, and James thought he could see the beginnings of a shape in the haze. A pointed muzzle, four slender legs. But nothing certain, nothing corporeal. The figure sighed again as the foggy light dissipated.

"Bloody NEWTs and bloody apprenticeship requirements," the figure sighed. "Blessed ancestors, grant me your strength and faith. I need a way out. I need a refuge from this damn war." James quietly sucked in a breath at that. Who was this? Not one of his housemates, he had determined that already. He wracked his mind, listing the other boys in his year. It was impossible to tell though. A Ravenclaw perhaps, they were more neutrally inclined.

"Bloody NEWTs," the figure said again, and leaned down, shouldering a bag. "Bloody *patronus*. Bloody bugging war." James bit back a snort at that, and held perfectly still, watching as the shadowed figure slipped from the room and headed one way. James waited a few minutes more, then slipped from the room and headed the other direction. Bloody NEWTs was right. He had studying of his own to do.

Three weeks later, not long after Halloween, they reached the section on the *patronus* charm in class. Lily Evans, the lovely pale brown skinned witch who James had been futilely chasing for years now, gave the answer when called upon; they were the only defense against Dementors, and

could also be used to repel Lethifolds. The professor awarded Gryffindor five points for the befreckled red-head's answer, and also told them the main secret to casting a successful *patronus* was focusing on a happy emotion or memory while incanting the spell, while dispelling the myth that 'Dark' witches and wizards were incapable of casting the *patronus*.

A riot of whispering and the scratching of quills was heard, and then they were instructed to stand one by one for the practical portion of the lesson. The professor warned them that she didn't expect any of them to actually produce a corporeal *patronus* as it was an above NEWT level spell after all. At James' shoulder, Sirius immediately began betting which of their classmates would come closest. Snape of course, was selected as least likely.

"It's not like the miserable little runt is even capable of happiness," Sirius teased under his breath, although his quiet tone did not disguise his disdain. "Slimy git." James grit his teeth. He'd been trying to rein in Sirius' antagonistic impulses toward the Slytherins in general and Snape in specific all year - hell, since the 'willow incident' at the beginning of the previous year. While Snape and Lily might not be friends any longer, James knew he wouldn't have a shot with her if she thought he was still an immature bully. In that light, James sharply kicked Sirius under the desk as the instructor informed them they'd be attempting the charm in reverse alphabetical order.

"Mr. Snape," the instructor called when it was the Slytherin's turn, and Snape stood, tossing his lank black hair back from his thin, sallow, light brown face. He thrust out his chin defiantly and took a deep breath, dark wand rising to the ready position.

"*Expecto Patronum*," Snape incanted firmly in a deep baritone, and James' insides liquified. The shadow in the mist rose in his mind. Silvery light flowed from Snape's wand. For a moment, it was just luminous cloud, and then a slender legged doe stood before Snape, gleaming eyes peering about. The quicksilver hind took a trembling step forward, then flagged her tail and bounded gracefully around the room before disappearing back into Snape's raised wand. Snape looked rather surprised, but very pleased. The professor looked poleaxed.

"Whoa," Remus breathed at the desk behind James, admiration evident in his tone. James nodded mutely. He could see the other students staring incredulously at Snape as well. The Slytherin's cheeks spotted with high color, and he sat hurriedly, his desk scraping awkwardly on the flagged stone floor.

"Very impressive Mr. Snape," the professor said, gathering her wits although her surprise was still quite evident. "Ten points to Slytherin. Can you explain your process to your classmates? You don't have to share the memory you used, just how you employed the emotion it contained." Snape's cheeks darkened further.

"I - uh - I just let the happiness I felt fill me up," Snape said rather unhelpfully, stammering under the weight of the class' attention. "And I - I used a - a wish, not a memory." His cheeks flared even darker at that. The bit of colour, James thought, looked good on the smaller wizard. Snape needed more sun, his naturally golden brown complexion had gone a pallid yellowish shade with lack of exposure since the beginning of term.

"An interesting idea Mr. Snape, very well done. It's a rather difficult concept to explain," the professor admitted with a wry smile. "Very good. Next, Mr. Rosier," she called, and another of the Slytherins stood. He could only produce an anemic mist though, and glared hatefully at Snape, sitting hurriedly. "That's to be expected," the professor said, and Rosier's glare grew even more pronounced. "Mr. Potter?"

James stood, closing his eyes against the inquisitive stares of his classmates. A happy memory. He took another deep breath, remembering his first time on a broom, the sensation of flying and the

warm sun on his ruddy brown face. A wish. Lily, smiling broadly, green eyes bright with affection, pink mouth curved with joy in her freckled, pale brown face. Another deep breath, and he let the happiness of the wish wash over and through him. He could do this. If Snape could do this, so could he. The shadow in the mist rose in his mind, and the thrum of a low, soft voice.

“*Expecto Patronum*,” James invoked firmly, pushing his swelling happiness into his wand. Silvery light swirled forth, and he could feel the warmth and joy of it at his fingertips. A quicksilver iteration of his animagus form, Prongs, bounded forward in gleaming evanescence. The hart tossed his magnificent rack of antlers and pawed a hoof, and James grinned. He flicked his wand, and the hart leapt agilely forward, head lowered in a charge.

“Very good!” the professor exclaimed. “Two corporeal *patroni*! Well, I’m very pleased. Ten points to Gryffindor!” James grinned, recalling the stag and sitting. Dark eyes caught his from across the aisle, shrewd and calculating. James dipped his head with silent respect to Snape, and those dark eyes widened. Slowly, Snape dipped his head in return, his high cheeks again spotting with colour, and an unexpected lance of joy filled James. In that moment, he was certain that he could conjure his *patronus* anytime he pleased with the image of Snape’s thin brown face, free of hate and disdain, his dark eyes peering up at James through sooty black lashes.

By supper time, news of James’ and Snape’s success with the *patronus* charm were racing through the student body. Glancing across the width of the Great Hall, James easily saw that the Slytherins weren’t best pleased by Snape’s accomplishment. It seemed odd to James, that Snape would be shunned for the same feat for which the Gryffindors so happily congratulated James. It was quite a complex spell after all, and Snape had won points with the performance.

It wasn’t until the next day that James heard the disgruntled muttering of the Slytherins, and understood the origin of their displeasure. *Shown up by a snivelling half-blood and a stupid blood traitor*, one Slytherin grumbled, and James knew that the blood-traitor was himself, which made Snape the half-blood. It made sense he supposed, he’d never heard of a wizarding family called Snape. *Can’t believe the little swot managed it*, sneered another. *Knew he wasn’t really one of us*, was another common refrain. *Overachieving git*, was the general consensus as far as James could tell.

Not that the other Slytherins had ever been terribly complimentary of Snape, at least not in James’ hearing. Mostly the other Slytherins seemed to ignore Snape, and when James had been more antagonistic in the past, they’d simply stepped aside and let James and his friends pick on Snape as they pleased, not wanting to draw the less than admiring attentions of the Gryffindors. The only exception had been Lucius Malfoy, but he’d graduated years before.

The disdain the other Slytherins held for Snape rankled James’ sense of honest, fair play when he thought on it much. While James had only recently come to see how correct Evans was when she called him an arrogant toerag and a bully, he was well aware that if anyone had picked on a Gryffindor in the way he and his friends targeted Snape, the whole House would have come down on the instigator like a load of bricks. And it couldn’t only be because Snape was a half-blood either. After all, Regulus Black got almost as much mistreatment as Snape, and it seemed Snape was the only person who ever stood up for Regulus, although the Gryffindors held back on Regulus for the most part out of respect for Sirius.

On his Head Boy rounds later that week, James found himself again contemplating Snape’s slight show of respect, and his *patronus*. He’d been thinking about both almost nonstop, in truth. The memory of the slim legged hind rose in his memory, and James flushed as he felt his heart trip over itself and his stomach twist itself into knots. The silver doe had been a beautiful creature though, shy and cautious and graceful.

A *patronus*, James remembered from his reading, was deeply representational of the caster and their desires. Snape's then - James couldn't imagine that someone bad - someone *evil* or Dark - could conjure a creation of such beauty. The professor had said a Dark witch or wizard could still conjure a *patronus*, but surely it wouldn't be one so unquestionably lovely if the caster was truly beyond redemption. James knew his own *patronus* represented not only his animagus form, but his ingrained love of freedom and strength of will.

Deer were sacred to Diana the Huntress, fleet footed Artemis Far-shooter. They were also under the purview of the Horned God, who James knew his family had long held as their patron. The arms of the Peverell family, from whom they were descended, were of a white hart rampant on a field of dark green. He had been unsurprised by his own animagus form. He had been very surprised by the form of Snape's *patronus*, and not only because he had assumed that wizards always had male *patroni*, and girls, female, although obviously it was often impossible to tell the difference.

As he walked and thought, James saw a slender, black robed form at the window, and James paused. The silhouette was familiar, and he knew who he had found immediately this time. He swallowed a snort of wry amusement. *Name the daemon and he shall appear*, indeed. The moonlight limned Snape's slender form in silver light reminiscent of the *patronus*, and James slowly headed toward the Slytherin. The sound of James' quiet footsteps alerted Snape of his approach, and dark eyes swung from the outside scenery to pin James.

"Snape," James greeted evenly, keeping his hands in his pockets, his stance unthreatening. Even before his attempts at pacification, James would have been loathe to take on Snape one on one. The Slytherin was well used to accounting for multiple opponents in a fight by now, and as a result was both a devilishly quick and fiendishly creative duellist. Now though, James had other considerations. He had wanted peace between them for some time now, although his motives for that peace had become rather murky and confusing even to him in the past week.

"Potter," Snape said in return. His tone indicated wariness and wear, but also curiosity. James could work with that. The Gryffindor smiled wryly, nodding at the broad sill on which Snape sat.

"Budge up," James half requested, half demanded, and Snape's dark eyes narrowed, calculating and shrewd. James felt as if he had been cracked open and laid bare beneath that heavy, dark look. But then Snape shifted his slender legs and narrow feet, tucking his toes up under his bum and silently permitting James to sit. James nodded, coming to perch on the sill. He looked out over the grounds, sighing.

"It seems so far away, so remote," James murmured. "It's hard to believe, on a night like this, that *he's* out there, torturing and raping and killing." He shifted, his knee accidentally brushing Snape's.

"Ignoring the less desirable aspects of life don't make them go away," Snape scoffed, lifting his chin in a good attempt at haughtiness.

"I know that," James bit out, his tone becoming slightly peevish. "I just - Hogwarts has always been so safe, so - *dull*."

"Maybe for you," Snape returned, his voice gone low and a bit hurt, and James turned. Snape had curled further into himself, head tilted down so his face was hidden in shadows beneath his limp hair. James reached out on instinct, then pulled his hand back before it made contact with Snape's knee. He had been one of the things that made Hogwarts patently *unsafe* for Snape, and knew it well. Internally James grimaced; while he'd made the decision to try and breach the gulf with Snape, he hadn't yet apologized for his past actions, or even informed Snape that they were under a truce.

"I know we've been right terrors to you," James sighed, reaching up to tug irritably at his curly forelock, then push back his riotous dark hair, leaving his honest brown face open. "*I've* been a terror. And I haven't any excuse. There is no excuse."

"What's this? An apology from the great James Potter?" Snape sneered, his thin lips pulling up unattractively. James felt his cheeks heat, and was glad his dark skin wouldn't show too much of a blush as he peered at the Slytherin from the corner of his eye.

"Yes actually," James acceded. "I know what we did - what *I* did to you is wrong. Dead wrong, and hypocritical to boot."

"That was five syllables Potter, I didn't know you could pronounce a word that long, other than *expelliarmus*," Snape sneered, clearly thrown by the apology and unsure how else to respond. James huffed softly, laughing and turning back to the window.

"Yeah, I know," James agreed, a slight smile turning up the corners of his full mouth. He turned, looking properly at Snape. The Slytherin was terribly thin and rather sickly looking, and quite a few inches shorter than James. He looked more a fifth year than a seventh. "You have options, you know. I know everyone says that the Slytherins are all destined to become Death Eaters, but you're far too clever for that nonsense, and I don't - forgive me, but it doesn't seem like that would be terribly safe for you either."

"Not really," Snape acceded softly, his chin dropping back to his chest, his face once more falling into shadow behind his chin length locks. "I'm a penniless, friendless half-blood in Slytherin. I know what I'm worth Potter, and in the grand scheme of things, it's not much."

James' chest tightened at the quiet desperation, the helpless resignation, in the other boy's voice. How must it feel, he wondered. To have no hope, no prospect of a better future? James already knew his path. He had applied to Auror Academy at the end of sixth year, and had a provisional acceptance already, pending his final scores and NEWTs. He hadn't got straight Os, but his natural skill in Transfiguration and hard work in Charms and Defense had stood him in good stead.

"You're worth as much as any other wizard," James said softly, and Snape looked up, his almond shaped dark eyes wide.

"Are you sure you're James Potter?" Snape asked somewhat incredulously, and James laughed softly.

"Yeah, I'm sure," James said with a grin that showed all his teeth. "I just - like I said, knowing what's out there - it seems so distant, but at the same time, like it's looming right before us, this yawning chasm of war and pain and darkness."

"Definitely Potter. So melodramatic," Snape scoffed, but not unkindly. James grinned at the slight tease, beginning to see now that Snape's prickliness was as much an emotional self-defense as anything, and that the Slytherin did have a sense of humor, although it was different enough from James' that he'd never recognized it as such before.

"Well, you know us Gryffindors," James said lightly, turning the jibe on himself with the ease of someone who has always been well loved, and known he was well loved. "Always blowing things out of proportion."

"That was another above NEWT level word Potter, I'm beginning to be seriously concerned that you're unwell. Had a brain transplant perhaps," Snape needled almost cautiously, and James laughed softly, even as his brow wrinkled. He thought he understood that last bit, but-



“Transplant?” James asked, not sure what Herbology had to do with brains, and Snape sighed, shaking his head. A slight smile tugged at one corner of his thin-lipped mouth though.

“A muggle medical procedure. If someone is badly injured or ill, they can remove the diseased or injured organ, and put in a healthy one from a recently deceased donor. Usually it’s things like heart, lungs, liver, kidney,” Snape explained, and James felt his jaw drop as his eyes went round.

“They can really do that?” James asked in amazement.

“Uh huh,” Snape said, warming to the subject. “Skin and blood too. Since they don’t have to worry about magical interference, but don’t have blood replenishing potions, they can take blood from one person and infuse it into another in cases of extensive bleeding, or graft live skin over an area where it’s been too badly injured to regrow, like a burn.”

“Whoa,” James said appreciatively. “That’s - huh. I’m pretty sure Remus would have told me about that sort of thing if they covered it in Muggle Studies. You know a lot about it.” Snape shrugged.

“My father was a field medic in the army, back before he got hurt,” Snape said by way of explanation. His voice was distant, and a bit uncertain. “I think he wanted to be a doctor - like a healer - but it didn’t work out for whatever reason. He still has a lot of books about it around,” he said with a shrug. James nodded, a bit surprised he had gotten an explanation at all, that Snape was bothering to speak with him.

“Is that what you want to do?” James asked after a lengthy silence. Snape turned to look at him, head cocked slightly. James couldn’t help but find the curious, confused expression on Snape’s thin face a bit endearing.

“I - I can’t afford it,” Snape stammered, flushing and dropping his gaze once more, shrinking into himself a bit. “I - I can’t really afford anything,” he said softly. “I - Malfoy, he - he says if I brew for him - his father, really, I think, he can speak to people on my behalf, give me a reference and pay my apprentice fees for a potions Mastery.” James’ generous heart positively lurched at that.

“Don’t do it,” James blurted out. Snape looked up sharply, obviously surprised. “You don’t want to be beholden to Malfoy, Snape, you just don’t. They ruin people for fun. Look at the Weasleys, and that was only over right of way on a country road in 13-something.” Snape turned back to the window, his narrow shoulders hunched in further.

“If you take him up Snape, he’ll own you the rest of your life. I may not be your friend, and I’m not asking you to trust me. But you know better than most perhaps that the Malfoys are trouble,” James quietly warned. Snape hesitated a moment, then nodded jerkily. It was the truth. While Lucius had protected Severus his first few years, that had been because Lucius was a Prefect, and likely been keeping an eye out for prospective talents even then.

The moonlight, James thought idly, did strange things to a person. It cast Snape in silver and shadow, and made him look strangely small and vulnerable. James reached out tentatively, resting his hand on Snape’s knee. Snape looked over sharply, his eyes dark but fiery.

“There are other ways to get ahead than that type of patronage,” James said.

“Not many, when you’ve a shite reputation and no money to spare,” Snape bit back, turning back to the window. Snape shook his head silently. “I don’t know why I’m telling you these things.”

“I don’t either,” James admitted. “But I’m glad you are. I - I don’t imagine you have many people

you can talk to about these things.” Snape nodded tightly at that. It was the truth. The closest thing he had to a confidant any more was Regulus Black, but he was well aware he couldn’t fully trust the conflicted younger wizard. “Listen I - I can ask around. Potions and Healing huh? I know you’ll have the marks for it, would Sluggo write you a reference? You’re in his club, aren’t you?”

“He wouldn’t. I - I’m neither rich, connected, nor attractive enough to be one of his favourites. Lily used to bring me sometimes to the parties, but I’m not a member,” Snape said softly, his voice hitching on her name, and James’ heart lurched again.

“She-” James started, and Snape shook his head.

“She’ll never forgive me,” Snape cut in sharply, refusing to listen to James’ platitudes. “With her - if she doesn’t forgive you within a week, she never will. She digs in, it becomes a point of pride. Merlin I was stupid,” he sighed, turning back to the grounds.

“Maybe you were stupid, but you were pushed beyond all endurance,” James said tightly. His stomach churned with regret. “I - I honestly don’t know how you’re managing to be so civil with me, how you can bear to have me sitting here.” Snape turned back to James and gave him a sad, twisted smile at that, shifting to let his head loll back against the deep window casing.

“What point is there in fighting?” Snape said softly, his voice low and a bit choked. “What have I left, for which to fight?” His all but expurgated northern accent thickened as he spoke, blotting out the polite RP syllables he had learned down in the dungeons. “I dared dream once, of a castle, of magic, of a bright new life open before me,” he said wistfully, and then scoffed. “More the fool me.”

James couldn’t help it. He reached out, clasping Snape’s bony shoulder. The Slytherin turned slightly to look up at him, but there was no emotion there, nothing but apathy. Snape didn’t seem to have any hope left. James gasped softly, and awkwardly tugged Snape forward. Snape tumbled gracelessly into James’ arms, forehead falling to rest against James’ collarbone.

Snape’s breath hitched, then again, but he didn’t sob, didn’t even weep. He was silent in James’ arms, shuddering with the intensity of his despair. James clasped him tighter, amazed at the warmth, the solidity of the other boy. Snape was shorter than James, and narrower across the shoulders, but he was all muscle and bone and sinew, his back sleek under his clothing for all that he had appeared a creature of mist and moonlight to James.

“You have yourself Snape,” James said in a soft strained voice. “Maybe the future doesn’t look so great right now, but if you fight, you could make it better for yourself. Seven years you’ve been fighting just to survive this school, don’t give up now. You’ve just about got those claws of yours to a razor edge, and we’re going to need all the help we can get out there.”

“And you think I’ll be fighting on your side?” Snape asked uncertainly, his voice raspy and a bit wet sounding.

“I think that the other Slytherins call you a half-blood and worse, and that isn’t likely to change in this environment. I think that clever as you are, you know that they’d use you for that big brain of yours but never be worthy of your trust, nor would they trust you. I think that despite your falling out, you’d never harm a hair on Lily Evans’ head, and as a muggleborn Head Girl, she’ll be straight in their sights,” James countered without animosity, and Snape sagged against him, mentally cursing the Gryffindor for his observational skills and understanding.

“I could never - I love her - she’s - she’s all that’s right and good in the world,” Snape breathed, not bothering to address the issues of blood and House, not daring say aloud that until tonight, until

James said Severus was worth more, no one save Lily had ever believed in Severus. James' heart lurched again, because he knew his own emotions for the beautiful Lily Evans didn't even come close to those Snape had voiced. He thought she was pretty and clever, and her refusals had become infuriating, an obstacle to be surmounted. But love? He doubted he knew her half well enough for that, and she was absolutely exasperating at times, could drive him into a temper like no other.

"You really do love her," James said softly, and Snape shifted, peering up at him through his thick dark hair.

"Lily was my first and best friend, from the time we were nine," Snape said softly, dark eyes darting appraisingly over James' face. "I'll always love her. She's like my sister." James' heart remembered how to beat, and he exhaled heavily.

"Oh," James breathed.

"Yes, oh," Snape said with a slight smirk. He flushed then, and dropped his eyes. "No one else wanted to play with a Gyp, and I - girls don't really," he stammered, and James' stomach flipped again. Snape was bent. His prick twitched at the thought of it, at the reality of Snape practically in his lap.

"Oh," James breathed again. Snape peeked up at him from beneath lowered lashes, wary and tense in his arms. "Makes no matter to me Snape. Bit of a relief actually, because Evans, despite not speaking to you, seems to respect you a hell of a lot more than she does me most days. Still won't give me the time of day." Snape snickered at that, the tension bleeding from his slender frame. He practically melted in James' arms as the wariness eased from him.

"Why so nervous about it? You know wizards don't judge on preference," James asked gently, chucking Snape under the chin. Snape flushed as his head was forced up, licking his lips nervously. He cocked his head slightly in James' fingers, then leaned in and tentatively pressed their mouths together. James gasped sharply, tugging Snape fully into his lap and returning the kiss, taking control of it.

"Severus," James gasped, cupping the slighter boy's firm bottom and rocking his own hips. Severus mewled softly, nuzzling under James' stubbled jaw and mouthing tentatively at his neck. "Merlin," James breathed, one hand kneading Severus' buttocks and urging him to rock closer. Severus whimpered softly, pressing tight. James' other hand fisted in the dark hair at the nape of Severus' neck, holding him in place.

"James - I - I've never," Severus breathed, and James forced himself to ease up. He shifted his hands to Severus' slender waist, panting softly.

"I'm not exactly experienced in this myself Severus," James murmured, brushing their lips together. Severus kissed back eagerly, chasing James' full mouth when James pulled back slightly. Severus blushed hotly, ducking behind his hair as his long fingers fiddled with James' collar. "I'd like to get to know you though."

Severus' fingers stuttered and stilled, and James waited, breath caught in his chest, until Severus finally looked up again. James practically growled, his hands tightening on Severus' narrow waist, and Severus mewled again. James grinned at that, a broad, happy expression of sheer delight. He'd never heard such a pretty sound, and it only emphasized how perfect it felt to hold Severus like this.

"Our magic," James breathed, and Severus nodded breathlessly.

"I can feel you all around me, supporting me, protecting me," Severus breathed.

"I want to be filling you," James panted. Severus moaned, arms raising to encircle James' shoulders.

"I'm chaste, and must remain so until I bond," Severus breathed.

"You're fertile," James murmured, guessing, and Severus flushed prettily, dropping his head to look away.

"I - I've never reacted like this before," Severus said simply. "I - I've known I was probably fertile since I was thirteen, when I didn't start getting hard like other boys. But I've never reacted like this before." James groaned softly, thrusting up against Severus' firm bottom. Rumour said fertile males were mothers of the very best sort. Fierce and loving and capable of providing a great many children to their proud lovers. They were also rather rare, as a wizard's body required a great deal of magical power to conceive and bear.

"I want you any way you'll permit me, my beautiful shadow in the mist," James argued. "For now, I - I would be glad just to get to know you better. And I promise, I'll do better about hemming Sirius in so he doesn't bother you. I'll make sure any betrothal or bonding contract ensures you can complete your mastery, continue your education in any way you like, work outside the home. But I - I just - I know you're meant to be mine Severus. Can't you feel it?" Severus flushed, lowering his dark eyes, and James took that as agreement. Severus felt this impossible resonance between them as well.

"You've been haunting me all year. I saw you practicing your *patronus* before the form settled, and I was mesmerized by you, although I didn't know it was you. And then - in class - Merlin Severus. I got hard watching you cast, seeing your hind," James went on, his voice lowering and growing husky. He was certain if he paused, he'd lose his dredged together courage, and never say what seemed so very necessary in the moment. "In class was the first time I managed a corporeal *patronus*, and I'm pretty sure I only could because I wanted so badly to match you, to show you that I was yours."

"And just like that, seven years of animosity, gone?" Severus asked, his voice a mixture of confusion and embarrassment and animosity, his light brown cheeks darkening with James' brash declarations. James grimaced.

"I've been trying to do *that* all year," James sighed, relaxing his possessive hold on Severus slightly and shifting so he was seated more comfortably in the wide window bay, Severus more easily ensconced in his lap. "Sirius doesn't adjust to change well - that's not an excuse mind, and I know I'm not his keeper, but, well. Anyway, Remus and I have been trying to distract him, but he deals with stress by looking for someone to torture. Again, not an excuse just - I stopped seeking you with intent to harm last year, after - you know," he said with a shamefaced blush, the night of that terrifying full moon looming large in both their minds.

James thought, but didn't say, that he had perhaps started on this path that night, when he had carried Severus bloodied and shivering up to the infirmary and stayed there all through the night, clinging to Severus' slender fingers and praying to ancient gods he scarcely believed in for the Slytherin's life, safety, and happiness. He'd grown incredibly protective of Severus in the aftermath, at least in his own thoughts, and Remus had helped him put the fear of the gods into Sirius for some time, although Sirius had been growing steadily more bold this year.

"Even without that rather sharp wake up call, hopefully I would have realized just what my disciplinary record must look like, and how that would look on my application to Auror Academy. I

mean, I know the family legacy in the Aurory will help, but I can't rely on that. Not with my future at stake," James said quietly.

"And now you want me in this future of yours," Severus said, looking up at James through his lashes. "Greasy little Snivellus." James blushed hotly, clutching Severus close. He had a lot to make up for, and knew he'd have to prove himself to Severus, and also his own friends. He was certain though, that it would be worth it, more certain than he'd ever been in his life, and he was a wizard given to sureties.

"Our magic is compatible," James insisted, letting his power flare out, nearly moaning as he felt Severus' power intimately and instinctively entwine with his. Severus' breath caught, and he shivered in James' strong arms. "I don't know if we'll ever be more than friends Severus, but I want us to be," he said huskily. "Maybe it's because you haven't fully come into your fertility, I don't know why you haven't reacted to other men like you do to me. But I can't bear the thought of anyone but me with you. I'd take you tonight and force a marriage by abduction if I didn't think you'd quite rightly hex my prick off."

Severus flushed and smiled slightly at that. Marriage by abduction bonds were tricky things, protecting the virtue of virgins who were taken in uncertain circumstances. If a virgin was defiled, and his or her defiler took them for seven nights consecutively, magic viewed them as wed, protecting the submissive partner's virtue and any children that resulted. But the bond also punished the aggressor if the submissive was truly unwilling, or the bond wasn't completed. Tales of vicious magical retribution by such bonds had long scared young Lords and Heirs into correct behavior.

"I know this is a lot," James murmured. "But can't we just - get to know one another, see where it takes us?" Severus hesitated, clearly cautious, and understandably so, but finally gave a brief nod. James grinned broadly, leaning down to steal a kiss from Severus' soft mouth.

"You can't just kiss me like that," Severus complained, but his voice was thin and breathy, and James' smile only stretched broader across his face.

"Not yet maybe," James agreed, still smiling. "I will earn your trust though Severus. And your kisses." Severus shook his head, but he was smiling too, a small smile, but a smile nonetheless, and one that reached his dark eyes. "So tell me about what you'd like to do as a Healer," he asked after a little while, and Severus smiled again.

"You'll think it's - it's cowardly," Severus said, turning away, looking back out the window.

"Never," James insisted, beginning to mentally gird himself, hoping to ensure he responded in whatever way Severus needed him to, to ensure that this barely thought of relationship took root to flourish.

"I - I want to see if there's a way to make werewolves - safe. To stop the transformation," Severus said with a pronounced shiver. James' heart about crawled up his throat. He crushed Severus against his chest, arms banded tightly around the trembling Slytherin. Burying his face in Severus' hair, he smelled the sandalwood and musk scent of him, breathing deeply to dispel his own instinctive fear of Severus being anywhere near a werewolf.

"I think that's actually about the *bravest* and most selfless thing I've ever heard," James argued when he could speak around the lump in his throat. "Maybe you had the idea because you were scared, but Severus, you're so terribly brave," he insisted.

"No," Severus said, his voice trembling. "I'm a coward, Po - James. I'm scared, all the time."



“Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgement that something else is more important than fear,” James said, with the air of a quotation. Severus shook his head against James’ muscular chest, but did not argue. James just held him until the trembling stopped, and Severus relaxed in his arms. “Would it help you to talk to Remus?” James asked gently. “While I definitely have an ulterior motive in you two being friends, I honestly think that you’d get on quite well.”

“I - I suppose it might help,” Severus said carefully. “Won’t Black and Pettigrew mind?”

“Sirius will be a pain in the arse, that’s a given,” James said fondly. “Pete won’t mind though, he’s a good chap, although I understand why you might not think so. I’d say you should chat with him too, but I rather think he’s afraid of you.” Severus let out a soft little laugh at that. “Leave them to me though. And I - I promise Severus, I won’t ever again raise my wand against you, but I can’t guarantee that I can contain Siri a hundred percent of the time either.”

“I understand,” Severus said softly. “And frankly, the whole school would think that something strange had occurred if you did. They’ll think it strange enough when they realize you aren’t targeting me, haven’t been targeting me. But I can hold my own when it isn’t all of you against me.” James’ cheeks heated at that, but he nodded in agreement. Severus was an excellent duellist, and James was honestly unsure which of them would prevail in a fair fight.

“And could we study together?” James asked. “I do alright on my own, but like I said, I’ll take any excuse to spend time with you.” Severus flushed at that, but nodded.

“That would be nice,” Severus admitted quietly. “I know you’re rather gifted at Transfiguration, and I’m - well, not,” he admitted.

“I don’t know how good I’d be at explaining, I just - get Transfiguration,” James warned. “I’d be glad to help as I can though.” Severus smiled at that, and leaned up. Their breath brushed warmly against one another’s faces, two pair of brown eyes, one pair darker than the other, read each other’s intentions. Tentatively Severus leaned in, his long dark lashes fluttering over his dark eyes, and then their lips were brushing lightly together.

James let out a low groan of desire but clamped down on his lust, letting Severus set the unbearably slow pace. Their mouths met properly, and James couldn’t help but part his lips, sweeping his tongue over the seam of Severus’ mouth. Severus gasped softly, and James, ever the Gryffindor, pushed forward where another man might retreat. He swept his tongue into Severus’ mouth, twining their tongues together. Severus moaned softly, melting into the kiss, his slender fingers sliding into James’ soft, wild hair at the nape of his neck.

“Okay, that’s a bad idea,” James panted when they parted. “I won’t be able to stop if you do that baby. You’re too perfect.” Severus felt his face heat at that, and pulled away slightly, withdrawing his hands and tentatively touching his flushed cheeks and kiss-swollen lips. “Let’s know one another better first,” James said, the strain evident in his voice. “I want you very much Severus, but if you give me the barest inch, I’ll take a country mile.” Severus snorted at that, then dissolved into what James would have labelled giggles on anyone else. With a broad smile, James leaned back, happy to simply hold onto the smaller wizard.

It would be difficult, James was well aware. Severus had run into problems from both their Houses for maintaining a friendship with Lily. For him to be known as James’ friend would cause similar issues, and those issues would only become larger if their relationship progressed beyond friendship. Muggleborns in particular, James knew, were quite derogatory towards same-gender relationships. James didn’t really understand why, although he knew it had something to do with their Church. But the main issue would be their history of antagonism, and their Houses. Most, he was sure, would assume that there was some long term prank in the works, or that one of them had

enchanted, bespelled, or potioned the other into compliance.

“It will be hard,” James said more seriously, although he knew that Severus would be well aware of that.

“As if that’s ever stopped either of us,” Severus scoffed, and James grinned.

“You’ll do it then?” James asked hopefully. “You’ll be my friend?” He paused, laughing softly. “Merlin, that makes me sound like a Hufflepuff, but you know what I mean. I *would* like us to be friends.”

“I won’t hex first,” Severus said, but his low voice was soft and warm, and James felt a corresponding warmth low in his belly.

“That’s a good start,” James said with false gravity, then nuzzled against Severus’ face before dropping light kisses over his forehead and cheeks and fluttering eyes. “I *will* earn your trust Severus,” he murmured. Severus didn’t respond, but that was alright. Grand declarations were more James’ thing after all.

“And you understand that I’m not - I’m not some damsel in distress?” Severus asked, looking up at James with those impossibly dark eyes. “I don’t want a self-proclaimed hero. I want a partner.” James grinned at that, his teeth flashing in the dim light.

“I know you’re no princess,” James said, grinning. “I’ve got the hexmarks to prove it.” At that, Severus smiled back. They parted after a little longer, although they sat mostly in silence during that time. It was a comfortable silence though, and for Severus, who was accustomed to silence, the idea of companionable silence was rather revelatory. Lily, who had been his only real friend, was not much given to silence, and would fill any lulls with happy chatter, and induce him to tell her about all sorts of things. He had a feeling that James was not a naturally quiet person either, there was a sense of innate restlessness to the Gryffindor, so he relished this quietude while it lasted.

But that night James permitted Severus’ silence, and joined in it, and Severus could only take that as a sign of respect, and begin to hope, just a little, that they maybe could come to some sort of peaceful agreement. Friendship seemed a stretch to Severus, but he’d never had a friend other than Lily, and few had ever made the attempt. In Cokeworth, he was seen as an odd boy from a bad home, a Gypsy child in ragged clothes. At Hogwarts, the other Slytherins had from the start disdained Severus for both his muggle surname and his obvious poverty. He’d earned a begrudging respect from them over the years with his academic skill, but that was all.

By the end of November, Severus had come to begrudgingly trust both James Potter and Remus Lupin, James more so than Remus, of whom he retained an ingrained and unreasoning fear. He still had running battles of both words and wands with Sirius Black, but both James and Remus readily intervened. The first time, Severus had been stunned to stillness when James countered Black’s spells and then loudly told his friend off.

Black was clearly displeased, and soon, one of his most common complaints was that Severus was somehow corrupting James with Dark magic. It was rather laughable in truth, and Severus laughed at it appropriately every chance he got. Despite his protestations about not being in need of saving, Severus couldn’t help but be pleased every time James went toe to toe with Sirius; it was an unmistakeable sign that James was honest about his desire to be with Severus.

James’ interference kept the combatants apart as much as possible. It was rather difficult of course; Sirius was his best friend, and as a result they spent a great deal of time together. James though, wanted very much to spend more time with Severus, and he was rather used to having his way.

Remus thankfully didn't mind diverting Sirius' attention, allowing James to hunt Severus down for alone time. It was during one of these times that the subject turned to their families.

James was quite rightly proud of his heritage. The Potters had been listed among the prominent wizarding families of Roman Britain. The first of their family documented in Britain had been native Silurian Celts employed in the construction of the Roman fortress of Isca Augustus in what was now the Welsh city of Caerleon. There were even mosaic portraits of those early, wealthy ancestors, James said, and even then they'd tended to name themselves after heroes and kings, or occasionally in those days, Roman Emperors; Augustus and Aurelius and Marcus and Caesarian as well as the more traditionally Welsh Llwyd and Bran.

The witches that married into the clan had been both Celts and Roman women in those days, dark eyed Italians skilled in weaving and other handicrafts. More than one woman of Saxon, Gaulish, or North African origin had been in the family in those days, their various magics passed down through the generations. There in Wales, the Lords Potter had married the last Heiress of the storied Gryffindor line, and another of the equally famous Peverell beauties, storied as much for their Celtic beauty as their ancient lineage.

James' own mother was a Longbottom, their families allied since the ancient days of the Roman wizarding council. His paternal grandmother was a Shackbolt, those two families also intermarrying with some frequency in more recent times, and giving James his warm brown complexion, wild dark hair, broad nose and full lips. Severus knew far less about his own magical family.

"I believe the current Lord Prince is my great-grandfather. My grandfather was a younger son, Aeolus Prince. He died in a lab explosion when my mother was quite young, and she was raised in her grandfather's house," Severus explained. His mother had instilled in him pride in the House Prince, and a firm belief that as a wizard he was a superior being. But she had spoken very little of her girlhood, other than a few stories of her time at Hogwarts. Severus had always been under the impression that she had not been a happy child.

"Stormholme, I've been there," James said, and Severus' eyes widened again. James could see the curiosity, the *greed* in the other boy's expression. "It was built in Roman times too, when some of the Prince ancestors first came to Britain. They're one of the older families, like the Potters. Roman wizards who married respected, powerful, native witches. Later, blood from the Otherlands married into the Prince line, when the northern part of Britain was held by the Raven King. It's said that's where the name Prince came from, even if the family was well established by then.

"Unlike many of the purebloods native to Britain, the Princes aren't terribly inbred, at least not until this century," James went on, calling up every bit of trivia he knew about the Princes and their estate. "They tended to import their brides and consorts from the Mediterranean and eastern Europe, sometimes as far as the Levant, and I believe there's Asian and East Asian blood there too. Since the publication of *The Sacred 28* though, they've succumbed at least partially to the pureblood mania. You said your grandfather was Aeolus?" James asked.

Severus nodded, drinking up the bits of family history his mother had never bothered to teach him. It made sense. As a boy, when he'd run wild in the woods and streets of Cokeworth, Severus had been a healthy golden brown, and he and his mother had been spit at and called gypo and piker and dago, despite that Eileen wasn't appreciably too much darker skinned than the other women on Spinners' End. But her style of dress, angular features, dark hair, and deep set eyes had been more than enough to set her apart, and Severus had been one of the darker skinned people in Cokeworth other than Lily's light brown skinned mother.

It was only as Severus grew older and took to spending all his time inside with his books and cauldrons that his complexion paled to a sallow light tan, although his prominent nose and strongly featured face also hinted at a Near Eastern or North African ancestry. It didn't help Severus' already stunted self-esteem that he knew that the cruel slurs carried truth, that paternally he was Romanichal, despite that his father looked more or less like the average Englishman.

"That would make your mother Eileen? Her mother - Cosima? A Farnese maybe?" James asked.

"Her name is Eileen, but I don't know who her mother's people were," Severus admitted. "She spoke only of House Prince, although not too much, and her mother not at all."

"Officially, or at least so far as I know, she was shunned but not disowned for breaking an arranged betrothal and running off. It's likely she got herself with child as soon as possible to ensure she couldn't be dragged before the altar and forced into a bond. There's some talk even now that the family was more angered by the loss of her bride price than the circumstances of your birth. Her betrothed was Cenanthe Prince, a distant, and now deceased, cousin from the European branch who was older even than her father would have been," James explained.

Severus shivered at the very thought of it. He'd never much understood contract marriages, but he was also well aware that he mostly thought as a working class person did, and such arrangements were the purview of the aristocracy. Then again, marriage in general had often seemed as if it was something that other people did. His love for Lily had been wholly familial, and he'd never been sexually attracted to anyone he thought he had a chance at before James. It was still a rather novel idea, being wanted, and while Severus didn't wholly trust James or James' desire, he deeply wanted both.

## Chapter End Notes

James' anachronistic quote about courage, "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgement that something else is more important than fear," is by Ambrose Redmoon, found here: <http://www.quote garden.com/courage.html>, and originally published in *Gnosis #21: Holy War* in 1991 ([http://www.lumen.org/issue\\_contents/contents21.html](http://www.lumen.org/issue_contents/contents21.html)).

# Princely Gifts

## Chapter Notes

These first three or four chapters are the longest, as I do some of the set up, and then we descend into a mix of porn, insertion of my personal headcanons, domestic fluff, and wartime badassery.

Sexual situations begin in this, the second chapter. There are also some not too graphic fight scenes, because I like my Severus to be both badass and an adorable cuddler, because I'm of the opinion he needs all the love.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If Severus was surprised at the quickly growing strength of attachment between James Potter and himself, he didn't show it. Slowly he found himself opening up to James, and to a lesser degree to Remus Lupin, who as James had suggested, had the potential to become a good friend. Severus was much more invested in James though, if only because James was much more invested in *him*. It still seemed utterly bizarre to Severus at times, that James Potter, one of the most eligible young purebloods in the school, would be interested in him, Severus Snape, half-blood swot. On paper, their only similarities were their lengthy disciplinary records.

And if Severus was surprised at his rapidly growing trust in and affection for James, he was even more surprised at the speed with which he received a letter from his *paterfamilias* after their talk about their families. Peredur Aethelstan Anupam Prince was an elderly man, older even than the Headmaster. He had a beautiful copperplate script though, and his letter demanded Severus' appearance at the Prince family estate of Stormholme over the Easter holidays.

Before then, Severus had to survive the rest of the fall term, then all of the winter term between the Christmas holiday and Easter. The Christmas holiday he planned to spend, as usual, at Hogwarts. His mother had never minded, had in fact encouraged him to spend all his holidays at Hogwarts so that he might be well fed, and able to practice his magic openly. Until then though, Severus found himself spending his usual library hours at the same table as James Potter. Remus Lupin sometimes joined them, but was often busy running interference to keep Sirius Black from discovering the budding relationship between James and Severus. Quiet whispers began to circulate, but mostly the professors and other students were just relieved that open warfare between them had, evidently, ceased.

They met up in out of the way corridors and classrooms as well, tentatively getting to know one another. Severus wasn't confident enough to speak too much about himself, and James was prone to prattling on about whatever took his fancy. More than one evening Severus rather bemusedly walked or sat at James' side, listening to the Gryffindor expound at length about the chances of one quidditch team or another. On the other hand, some evenings James would speak at length on Transfiguration theory, it being his favorite school subject, or the interesting places he'd holidayed with his parents as a boy.

James was, Severus sometimes thought, like some sort of strange otherworldly creature who happened to be passing through Severus' otherwise stressful existence. It was even stranger when James, realizing he'd been talking for an hour, quieted and gently pressed Severus to speak. At



first, Severus was stiff and standoffish, not sure what he should speak about. He had no real friends, no amusing boyhood anecdotes or interesting holidays in exotic locales. He talked about potions a little, and about Lily a little, and was surprised when James was more interested in the potions than the beautiful redhead.

In late November though, the real world intruded when James had word from home. His aunt and uncle, the primary Heirs to his grandfather the Lord Potter, had been attacked. There were sensational details in the *Prophet* that morning, on how Charlus and Dorea Potter and their son Ignotus were ambushed by fanatical followers of the rising Dark Lord as they were leaving the Royal Opera one night. Quite a few muggles had been killed, and Charlus and Dorea were credited with saving many more. Dorea though, died of her wounds, and although Ignotus was mostly unharmed, Charlus was gravely injured.

It was no real surprise that the letter bearing the news also informed James that his father had already written the Headmaster, and that James would be expected home that evening, and was excused from class for the remainder of term. He'd miss more than a week, but no one could argue against a family's desire to be together in these dark times. James and Severus parted in private, promising to write.

Rather to Severus' surprise, he had his first letter from James the very next morning. It had clearly been written late the night before, and James had the same tendency to ramble on paper as he did in person, but Severus couldn't help but find his suitor's slightly messy quillwork and circuitous sentences a bit endearing. They exchanged letters frequently until all the students, James included, returned after Christmas. The letters though, helped both young wizards know one another better, and it was easier in a way, since their letters were private, and it was a little less anxiety inducing - or anxiety inducing in a different way - to write their secrets to one another, instead of speaking them aloud.

As the returning students rambunctiously filled the Great Hall that first night back, Severus watched them cautiously. He caught a glimpse of James' wild dark hair, his warm brown skin, and then the glint off his glasses. James' tawny hazel eyes caught Severus', and his wan, tired expression faded into one of pleasure. Severus could see in that instant that the other wizard was emotionally exhausted, and also that he wanted to guard Severus and their relationship even more closely. Severus didn't mind that. He quirked the corner of his mouth just slightly, and dipped his head, and James nearly grinned at that subtle acknowledgement.

James found Severus in the window seat he seemed to favor shortly after curfew that night. James grinned, letting his feet scuff slightly on the stone floor as he approached. The few times he'd managed to surprise Severus, James had ended up with a wand in his face, and once with a rather impressive set of donkey ears in place of his own. Severus looked over, and James' smile softened. He strode over and swept Severus up into a hug, burying his face in the smaller wizard's dark, silky hair.

Through their letters, James had discovered that Severus' impoverished family couldn't afford indoor plumbing, and so he'd never had the luxury of hot showers and long soaking baths until he came to Hogwarts. Naturally, Severus' hygiene had suffered as a result, earning him the reputation of 'greasy' that he still carried. As a male bearer, puberty had been doubly unkind to Severus, as he not only had the usual male issues of his voice breaking and spotty skin, but with another dose of hormones on top, related to the development of his womb and pseudo-mammaries. He was fastidiously neat and clean when possible though, having learned and taken to heart the strict Rromani cleanliness edicts his muggle grandparents had taught his father, despite being unable to carry them out as a child, and he always smelled absolutely divine to James, musky and masculine, but soft and warm too, spicy and clean.

“Did you have a good holiday?” James asked gently, not loosening his hold on Severus in the slightest. Being away from Severus had been unbearable for James. He already felt more for the Slytherin than he ever could have anticipated, and with a depth of feeling that made his former crush on Lily Evans seem incredibly shallow. She was pretty and vivacious, with curling dark red hair, pale brown skin, and big, green eyes. And she was clearly intelligent, given her position at the top of the class, but to James’ current thinking, Severus eclipsed her in every possible way.

“It was quiet here,” Severus said softly. “I - I missed you,” he admitted bravely, his words forming against the lightly stubbled brown skin of James’ neck. James hardened fully at that, having gotten half hard when their eyes met in the Great Hall earlier.

“I missed you too Very,” James murmured, ducking his head slightly to nuzzle into Severus’ hair and then kiss the slight point on the shell of his ear. Severus let out a soft, wanting sound, and James dragged them into a dark alcove, conveniently shielded by a heavy tapestry. Gently James manhandled Severus until he could take that longed for mouth in a deep kiss. Severus melted against his lover, moaning softly with desire.

“I want to touch you,” James husked, one of his large, square hands kneading Severus’ buttocks. Severus moaned, but nodded, his cheeks heating. Severus reached down, fumbling open his trousers. James groaned as he was able to push Severus’ lower clothing off and take a handful of smooth, firm flesh. Severus moaned, his hips hitching as James’ fingers brushed into his cleft and over his entrance. They both knew that penetration was absolutely forbidden at this point, but that didn’t mean they couldn’t play.

As James kneaded and moulded Severus’ buttocks, Severus fumbled James’ trousers open as well. James swore loudly as their cocks rubbed together, and then again as Severus’ graceful golden-brown hands grasped his erection. James groaned deeply as Severus began to stroke him for the first time. It was obvious that the Slytherin didn’t really know what he was doing from that angle, but it still felt incredibly good.

“Tighter sweetheart, squeeze me tighter, that’s it,” James encouraged, his voice lowering and growing rough. “Now twist a little as you pull. Feels so good baby. That’s it. Now rub the head, just over the slit, fuck Very, so good baby,” he panted, clutching at Severus’ buttocks and pumping into Severus’ grasp as Severus learned all the little things that brought James off quickest. Severus held on, doing the best he could, and it didn’t take much for James to come, his seed spurting over Severus’ hand and both of their trousers and pants.

“Oh,” Severus breathed quietly, breaking away to look down at the mess. James chuckled softly. Tentatively, Severus shot a look up through his lashes at James. There had been something - he felt his face heat, and raised his hand. The motion drew James’ attention, and James’ eyes widened behind his fogged glasses as Severus hesitantly licked up the semen that clung to his slender fingers. James groaned softly in appreciation, and Severus hummed, his pointed pink tongue darting out to lick up a little more.

“You like that?” James growled, and Severus looked up with an attractive combination of pleasure and secretiveness, suckling more insistently at his fingers as he hesitantly nodded. Gently James pulled Severus’ fingers from his mouth, then fed his lover with his own fingers. Severus hummed softly, sucking and licking up every salty drop. Severus gave James an unreadable look, then dropped to his knees and gently licked James the rest of the way clean. James swore, staring in wide eyed appreciation as Severus’ tongue fluttered over his cock.

James’ soft prick tasted incredible to Severus. Curious about some other things he’d heard and read, he suckled the tip into his mouth, earning a swear from James. He could feel the pulse

through the thin, soft skin, and moaned eagerly, his own arousal unabated. James swore again, fingers combing gently through Severus' black hair and urging him to take more of James' cock into his mouth. Severus complied, feeling the prick between his lips begin twitching back to erection.

The thickness of it was soon stretching his jaw, the leaking tip slicking along his soft palate to press against the entrance to his throat. Could he? Severus wondered, and swallowed convulsively as he leaned even closer, trying to take more of James into his mouth. He moaned as the knob penetrated his throat, feeling wanton and eager. James swore above him, and tried to push deeper. Severus choked, gagging, but when he swallowed James' cock was even deeper in his throat, and Severus' nose was pressed against the musky dark hair of James' groin.

Severus moaned, unable to believe he had James' whole erection in his mouth. While he was no expert, this being the first penis other than his own that he'd even seen up close, Severus was pretty sure that James, like himself, was more well endowed than any of Severus' dorm mates. He knew that many pureblood, and certainly those he roomed with, ascribed to the archaic Greek philosophy that found smaller manhoods more attractive, and Severus had been teased about his size more than once as a result. Severus couldn't help but feel pleased that James was also larger, around the same size as Severus there when soft, and definitely larger when hard. Needing to breathe eventually, Severus pulled back, gasping for air.

"Again," James gasped hopefully, and Severus smirked, leaning in to slowly bestow kittenish licks to the tender head of James' cock, gently pushing back the deep brown foreskin to expose the pink glans. James groaned, trying to push himself into Severus' teasing mouth. Severus complied this time though, angling his head so the tip of James' erection scraped against the roof of his mouth. James groaned raggedly, gently fisting his hand in Severus' long hair and pushing even deeper. Severus gagged a little as his throat was breached again, but remembered the trick of it and swallowed James' erection down.

"Feels so good sweetheart, fuck your mouth was made for this," James swore, half incoherent with arousal already. He did his best not to choke Severus, but it felt so impossibly good to fuck the smaller wizard's throat. James thrust as gently as he could, but Severus' swallowing soon stole his control. Snapping his hips, James sank in to the hilt and thoroughly fucked Severus' mouth.

Severus moaned, but didn't pull away, learning quickly to take short breaths through his nose and keep swallowing. It didn't take long for James to reach orgasm, and he came hard, holding himself as deep inside Severus as possible as his hips jerked with release. Severus swallowed desperately, but he didn't have the experience to keep from choking and gagging every so often around the deep penetration.

Finally James slumped back, letting his soft cock slip from Severus' throat. Severus gagged and choked, noisily slurping up the semen and saliva that clung to James' cock. Sitting back on his heels, Severus tried surreptitiously to wipe away the tears that had escaped his watering eyes. After a moment though, James swore softly and reached down, cupping Severus' face in both hands and urging him to his feet.

"Did I hurt you baby?" James asked worriedly, hazel eyes darting over Severus' flushed face. Severus flushed more deeply in response, shaking his head.

"I just - it didn't hurt," Severus said softly, his voice rougher than usual. "I - I liked that you lost control," he admitted. "I - I guess I'll just need to practice." James groaned deeply at that, and clutched Severus into a tight embrace, then kissed away his tears before taking his mouth in a deep, thorough kiss.

“I won’t say no,” James murmured huskily, his hand finding Severus’ buttocks again. “But you don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“I wanted to,” Severus breathed, pressing himself tight against James to speak against his ear. James groaned, then firmly pushed Severus away. “I know,” Severus practically pouted, knowing that James was about to say something distressingly responsible. Severus cursed that Gryffindor honour with some frequency when his newfound libido was in high gear. James smiled wanly, then leaned down to kiss Severus’ swollen lips softly.

“If I didn’t have a rather thorough fear of marriage by abduction bonds, I would take you tonight,” James promised, and Severus flushed.

“We both know I would be willing, but I would rather not bring shame upon either of our Houses,” Severus demurred, his cheeks hot. And a marriage by abduction would do just that, especially given their current respective social positions and reputations. People would intimate for the rest of their lives that Severus had somehow ensnared, enchanted, or otherwise bewitched James, no matter the truth they were presented with. Even with a proper courtship, there would be rumours.

“I’ll see you in the morning,” James murmured, and then fumbled his pants and trousers back into place before stealing away. Severus waited a few minutes more, smiling rather smugly to himself as the assignation played itself over in his memory. The first time he’d heard the other boys talking about blowjobs, he’d been disgusted, not understanding why anyone would want either a mouth on their penis or a penis in their mouth.

James hadn’t pressured him in the least to take this step in their relationship either. When Severus had tried in their letters to find out what James expected with regards to intimacy, James always insisted that they’d only do what Severus was comfortable with. It was a decidedly un-Slytherin suggestion, and made Severus quite glad that his suitor was the very epitome of Gryffindor. He’d scared himself silly reading about male fertility when he was going through puberty and realizing that his body wasn’t changing in the same ways as the other boys, and many of those fears lingered.

Even though James was back and they could meet face to face, the two suitors continued to write to one another, although not as frequently. The winter term went quickly, the teachers piling on NEWT revision work and independent projects. On top of all his regular schoolwork, Severus started researching the work of every Potions Master and Healer active in magical Britain, as well as polishing a few short research papers of his own, knowing that having work published was about the only way to set himself apart, even with his good grades. With so many things going on, it was no real surprise that the winter term was over in a blink of the eye.

It was with more than a little trepidation that Severus flooded from Platform 9 3/4 to the Ravensgate Inn in Upper Flagley, where he would be met by a representative of the Princes. This representative turned out to be one of his mother’s cousins, a man of fifty or so years named Caractacus Prince. He was from the second branch of the family, Severus from the third. The first branch had thus far produced no Heirs, and Caractacus’ elder brother Wayland was the current tertiary Heir, their father Aristides, the secondary, and their uncle Leandros, the primary. Severus’ grandfather, Aeolus Prince, had died when Severus’ mother Eileen was very young, and she had no siblings.

Caractacus Prince was a tall, olive-brown skinned man with a patrician nose and high brow, his wavy blue black hair neatly cut and combed back from his aristocratic face. He had luminous violet-grey eyes, which Severus would soon learn were characteristic of the Prince family. Severus guessed the man in his fifties or sixties, rather older than his mother would have been if she lived, although it was hard to tell with wizards. He wore neat and elegantly simple robes, not ostentatious

in any way, but clearly marked with the Prince family arms, a raven volant, with a Marquis' crown above and surrounded by their motto, *audemus jura nos defendere*, or, 'we dare defend our rights.'

"Mr. Snape?" Caractacus asked in a low, slightly gravelly voice, with a strong Northern accent, and Severus nodded, half bowing in greeting.

"Yes sir," Severus returned in little more than a whisper, his stomach churning with nerves.

"I'm Caractacus Prince, the family solicitor. My carriage is out front," Caractacus introduced, and with that fastened his mantled traveling cloak and led the way. The carriage was a massive black lacquered conveyance with the house seal on the doors and four muscular black horses in harness. A postilion held the headstall of the lead horse until Caractacus and Severus climbed in, then swung up and gigged the team into a steady pace.

Severus rode in anxious silence, watching his cousin warily and also watching the surrounding countryside. They soon left the mixed magical and muggle village of Upper Flagley behind, and the carriage put on speed as they crossed the picturesque Dales. Eventually they pulled up at a massive wrought iron gate. Caractacus performed a silent spell, and the gates creaked open. Severus shivered as the wards washed over him as they passed through.

Beyond the gates, the carriage entered an allee of pollarded and planched beeches and limes, with a quickset hazel hedge beneath. The wall of greenery obstructed any view of the estate itself until they pulled up in a massive circular drive. At the center of the circle was a massive stone and iron fountain depicting the Norns pouring out the Water of Life at the base of Yggdrasil. As James had said, the oldest part of the house was Roman, but it had been added onto, renovated, and changed a great deal since those long ago days.

Caractacus led Severus into the massive grey stone building, past an altar to the household gods of the Roman fashion, although there were other gods Severus recognized there as well, elephant headed Ganesh and bull horned Ba'al. From there, Severus was led through a series of salons, galleries, and drawing rooms, each more elegant than the last. The solicitor was silent, and Severus was too nervous to instigate any sort of conversation. He likely would have remained silent even if he were a more talkative person by nature.

The walls inside were decorated with priceless tapestries, paintings, and works of art, the floors inlaid in intricate patterns with myriad colored marbles. The ceilings were frescoed beautifully, and Severus thought he had never seen any place so incredible, save perhaps Hogwarts herself. Here though, the portraits were mostly silent, although Severus could see common features in many of them; gleaming violet eyes, raven-dark hair, strong noses, high cheeks, and a great many scowling mouths.

Finally they arrived in a handsome wood panelled office. Leather bound tomes filled ornately carved bookshelves, interspersed with attractive ancient sculptures and interesting natural specimens. At one end of the room was a massive writing table, but the leather chair behind it stood empty. The wall behind the desk was the only one without shelves built over it, and centered upon the rich wood panelling was a large double portrait of a handsome couple in wedding attire, the witch in an ornate red saree with gold decoration, the wizard in crimson and cream sherwani, and both dripping with golden jewelry and flowers.

A large raven perched near the desk, beady eyes surveying the room intelligently. The elderly Lord Prince sat before the fire in a handsome wingback armchair upholstered in dark leather. His long legs were extended before him, resting on an ottoman and covered with a fur blanket. A pair of sleek blue greyhounds with grizzled muzzles lazed near the footrest, their noses at his slippered feet.



“My Lord, the late Lady Eileen’s son, Severus Tobias Snape. Mr. Snape, the most Noble, Ancient, and Puissant Peredur Aethelstan Anupam-Prince, first of that name, 57th Marquess of Hrafnswath in the Ancient Honour of Richmond and County of York, by grace of The King in the North,” Caractacus introduced. Severus bowed awkwardly, not quite sure what the protocol was for a situation like this. While his mother had taught him manners as she was able, he hadn’t been raised with the usual pureblood etiquette drummed into him, and his father had been contemptuous of anything that sniffed of the aristocracy.

“Be seated Caractacus, young Mr. Snape,” Lord Prince rasped, his voice low and breathy. He wheezed softly, peering at Severus with rheumy purple eyes. Unlike his grandson, Lord Prince wore his hair long in the traditional manner for Heads of Family. It fell in a thick silvery white cascade over his broad but somewhat hunched shoulders. His lean, brown, face was deeply graven with wrinkles, a long white beard obscuring the lower half, although his upper lip was bare, leaving his thin lips visible. Despite the years borne on Lord Prince’s face, it was clear that the wedding portrait on the wall was his own.

With the added evidence of that portrait, and even through the generations between them, Severus could see that his own looks were actually remarkably like those of his family, although Severus was somewhat paler than Lord Prince. His mother had been even paler skinned than Severus himself, and Severus had always assumed she was wholly of English stock despite the names they were called in the streets of Cokeworth, that his darker skin was somehow a Rromani inheritance that had skipped his pale skinned Romanichal father.

“Mr. Snape, I have had correspondence from Lord Potter that his grandson, young Lord James Cyneric Ignotus Potter desires you as bondmate. He claims this grandson knows you fertile and willing to submit,” Lord Prince said, his voice breathy but still powerful, commanding. Severus flushed but nodded, not sure what to say to that. “Are you willing to be examined by a Healer to document and certify your purity and fertility in anticipation of courtship?”

“If that is my Lord’s wish,” Severus said nervously, twisting his fingers together in unconscious show of his anxiety. While he had numerous times been under the wand of Madam Pomfrey, the Hogwarts mediwitch, he’d never had a thorough exam by a true Healer, and rather feared what it might find, and what these newly met relatives might think of him. Would they be ashamed to know that their kin couldn’t even defend himself from a muggle?

“He writes also that his grandson wishes you to continue your education as you desire should you bond, that you wish to pursue a Mastery in potions, and have an additional interest in Healing,” Lord Prince continued, squinting through his pince nez. The words broke through Severus’ self flagellation, bringing him back to the present.

“I should appreciate the opportunity to continue my education my Lord, and enjoy very much the art of potions. I have yet to find a Master willing to take me however,” Severus said hoping the heat in his cheeks did not show overmuch, and resolute that he would not ask for funds or a letter of introduction despite that the Princes were well known and well thought of in both the fields in which he was interested. The famous Arsenius Jigger after all, was a Prince by maternal descent. As to the matter of bonding - he knew James wanted that, but it still seemed an impossibility to Severus, that someone so acclaimed for his appearance and skill be interested in *him*.

The Lord Prince peered at the boy who sat across from him. Severus looked very much like his mother, though he didn’t seem to have her fiery spirit. Eileen had been his favorite grandchild, the only girl. He had thought betrothing her to be in her best interests, although now he supposed he could see why she wouldn’t wish to be bound to her distant, and rather aged, cousin despite that such matches were rather common among magical persons of their rank.

The boy was slender, too slender, Peredur thought, and far too wary and nervous for his age. He didn't like what those signs pointed to. But potions weren't the only subtle art at which the Princes excelled. Peredur performed a silent *leglimens*, deftly breaching his great-grandson's undefended mind. There were some natural defenses, as Peredur expected from one of his bloodline, but no true barriers. He found quickly the memories he had feared, the boy's father beating him, beating Eileen. His intractable girl was utterly broken in the memories, a meek, cowering thing who defended neither herself nor her only child.

"I shall need to know you better child, before I can respond to Lord Potter's request. This summer, you shall come here, and study under my Heir, Lord Leandros. If you are found acceptable, you shall be blood adopted and formally Invested in the House, and due consideration given to this request for a contract of courtship. If you are found wanting, you shall be struck, and nevermore recognized a member of House Prince," Lord Prince declared in his low, rasping voice.

"I know well I've not long for the world. I can hear the veil whispering in my dreams, the Blessed ancestors calling me home to my rest. Soon House Prince shall be the concern of Lord Leandros. I would have Eileen's loose end tied up by then," Lord Prince went on. Severus felt his cheeks heat at being called a loose end, but nodded, knowing better than to argue with the frail looking but still magically and politically powerful Head of his family line. "You are my guest here until you are called back to Hogwarts. Caractacus, see he is comfortable," Peredur declared with a negligent handwave. Caractacus nodded at that, and Severus was soon installed in an expansive guest suite.

For the remainder of the Easter break, Severus not only revised for his NEWTs, he also read avariciously in the Prince library and underwent tedious etiquette and protocol lessons with the older Lords of the house. The entire extended family lived at Stormholme, although they also kept a house in London, where Caractacus stayed during the week, and Lord Prince when the Wizengamot was in session. It was a rather stressful holiday overall, and Severus felt very awkward in the beautiful house with his bad posture, crooked nose, and secondhand robes. Thankfully, he had his letters from James to cheer him up.

Nearly every day there was a rambling missive from James. Some bragged on adventures with Sirius and Remus, whom had accompanied James home to Hartsfield, the Potter estate in the Cotswolds for the break, purportedly to study together. Others told Severus about James' parents Edmund, whom he took after physically, and Leonora Potter nee Longbottom, or his grandfather, the Lord Potter. Like the Princes, the entire Potter clan lived together at the family manor, but kept a townhouse in London where they could stay when conducting business in town.

Severus replied in kind, telling James about his newfound relatives, and the lessons he had to undergo. He also shared tales of exploring Stormholme and its surrounding grounds. It was quite nice, having someone elsewhere he could tell these things to, as he wasn't entirely comfortable with his relatives, of whom the fifty-ish Caractacus was the closest to Severus in age. Severus had never been terribly trusting, but he had far more confidence in James, who had been so sweet to him for months now, than in the relatives who had left him in a squalid and abusive home for so many years.

Returning to Hogwarts after the Easter Break, Severus found himself curled against James' side on the Hogwarts Express. The Head Boy spoke to him quietly and respectfully, his warm brown hand stroking Severus' spine and flank soothingly. While they had been exchanging letters and secretly meeting and seeing one another since that moonlit night after Halloween, and others had seen them together before, during that final term Severus and James went public with their relationship.

There was a great deal of negative reaction of course, but James was incredibly loyal and even more stubborn, and Severus couldn't help but flush with delight every time James stepped in as his

protector. The most vocal critics of the relationship were Sirius Black, which was entirely expected, and the pureblood Slytherins, which was a bit unexpected. None of them, Severus knew, had any respect for the Potter family, which was seen as modernist, or rather, 'muggle loving,' by the traditionalist Slytherins. Even so, those same traditionalists ragged on James for dating a halfblood.

Severus' time at Stormholme though, had included a basic overview of the current political situation, and he was aware that technically speaking, the Potters were in the more neutral, moderate grouping of purebloods, and were still fairly traditional as these things went, hence the pending courtship agreement. The Potters didn't discriminate based on blood-purity though, or at least not to the degree that the supporters of the Dark Lord did, nor were they supporters of the Dark Lord themselves. That seemed to be the main problem with the 'Traditionalist' faction, who had gained a largely *if you aren't with us, you're against us*, mentality.

James didn't care much about the other Slytherins or their opinions, as Severus was well aware. The main reason James had never gone out of his way to antagonize them before had been lack of interest, although he'd pranked almost every student in the school at one point or another. Now, James brought that mischief making ingenuity fully to bear against the Slytherins that denigrated his relationship with Severus. The tricks served two purposes, punishing the Slytherins the more obvious one, but also training Sirius Black's antagonism toward a target that wasn't Severus. Of course, such diversions didn't always work, and James' and Sirius' relationship soured even as James' and Severus' relationship grew stronger and more intimate.

Finally, graduation was upon them, and Severus was awarded special prizes for his potions, arithmancy, and defense skills. He hadn't anticipated any such, and was rather thrilled at the public recognition, ducking bashfully behind his hair upon receipt of the prizes. James took the transfiguration prize, and second place in defense, and when the ceremonies were complete, introduced Severus to his parents Edmund and Leonora Potter, uncle Charlus, cousin Ignotus, and grandfather Lord Hector Potter, who as nearly the same age as Severus' great-grandfather Lord Prince.

Hector Potter was paler than James, partially due to old age, his cloud of white hair worn long, but clubbed back at the nape of his neck. Hector's sons, Charlus and Edmund, were darker skinned, their deceased mother having been a Shacklebolt. Dorea Potter had passed her storm grey eyes to James' cousin Ignotus, but had little other influence on his appearance, save perhaps a slight variation in the texture of his hair. Likewise, James' petite blonde mother, Leonora, had had little effect on James' looks, save perhaps lightening his eyes from brown to hazel. The Potter men were all remarkably similar looking, although their skin tones varied between Hector's lighter tawny-brown to Charlus' and Edmund's deeper, almost cool toned dark brown.

Lord Prince had also come, and brought his sons and grandsons with him. The Ladies of the House were absent, save Caractacus' wife, a stylish Egyptian witch named Alina. Like the male Potters, the male Princes were very similar to one another physically, although of the six of them including Severus, the elderly Peredur was the darkest, his sienna brown skin deeply wrinkled and weathered with age.

Lord Prince's late wife Vinita had been paler skinned, and that was her main physical influence on their sons. Leandros, Aristides, and Wayland weren't identical by any means though, their skin ranging from a paler fawn colour to a warm, almost terra cotta shade, and their features distinguishing them as well. Severus' grandfather, Aeolus, had been the palest of the four, although that was in part due to long hours spent researching in the laboratory.

Severus greeted his relatives nervously but politely, and made the introductions between them and

the Potters, thanking every benevolent deity he knew when he managed to get everyone's name right. The two elderly Lords spent some time in quiet conversation, and then, with a final chaste kiss from James, Severus was whisked away to Stormholme.

The next two months of Severus' life was spent largely at the Prince's estate. He had a few owls from Slytherins he knew were in the service of the Dark Lord, either congratulating him on his ascendancy or trying to ingratiate themselves. He burned most of them. Only the letters from Regulus Black were answered. The younger Slytherin was the closest thing to a friend Severus had among his housemates, and their relationship was really more of an unspoken mutual protection agreement. All the same, there was a degree of respect between them, although they were not especially close.

Severus wasn't in complete seclusion however. His relatives took him on expeditions around the country and into Europe, northern Africa and the near east, once travelling as far away as India. They discussed business, potions, plants, and all sorts of things, and slowly Severus began to come out of his shell. They often stayed with more distant branches of the family on their excursions, and Severus haltingly picked up snippets of Farsi, Arabic, Italian, Punjabi, and Rromani. There were also small social gatherings in England and abroad, where Severus' relatives watched him carefully as he interacted with selected young peers. James was often Severus' escort to society events in England, allowing them time to see one another, and their relatives time to see them together.

On August first, in a circle of native stones that had been raised by their Gaelic ancestors, Severus knelt, naked before the altar. Every living member of the British branch of House Prince was with him as he was gently painted with blood and woad, then formally blood-adopted by Lord Prince. It wouldn't affect his place in the succession, merely grant him a stronger tie to the Prince bloodline and replace any genetic legacy not tied to magic - namely, his muggle father's. The ceremony included a rite of renaming, which while unofficial would soon be followed up by paperwork to legally change his name to Severus Tiburon Melanthios Prince and formally Invest him in the House.

The very next morning they went to Gringotts for his renaming and Investiture, and Severus was moved from the guest suite he had been sleeping in to a suite in the family wing of Stormholme. While the elves were relocating his meagre belongings, Caractacus and his wife Alina established Severus' vault, then took him to the upscale couturier the Prince wizards patronized to procure him an elegant wardrobe worthy of a scion of House Prince.

Not finding anything at the usual atelier that suited Severus' more androgynous figure and liminal position as a bearer, Alina led them to the roberie she preferred, and some less traditionally masculine styles were decided upon. They weren't overly feminine, but Severus, who had never been spoiled or coddled in the least, couldn't help but love the softer fabrics and finer detailing on the garments more frequently favoured by conservative witches.

Once Severus' wizarding wardrobe was complete, they took him to Lady Alina's beautician. The beauty-witch soon had specialty potions customized for his hair and skin type. She also cast a series of complex spells that mixed charms and transfiguration to permanently straighten and whiten his teeth and repair his oft-broken nose.

Once the beautician released them, complete with a bag full of potions Severus was ordered to use on his face and hair, they ventured into muggle London. Their first stop was Harrods, where Severus was forced to parade in and out of the changing rooms for his cousins. When they had a casual muggle wardrobe worthy of a young Lord purchased, they went on to Savile Row, to order Severus some bespoke suits. Finally, Severus was returned to Stormholme, exhausted by their shopping expedition.

While they had been away, Lord Prince had been busy meeting with Lord Potter. Severus was hurried up to his new room to change into one of the new sets of robes that had been ready that day, and then reported to the Lord's office. With their elder Heads of House standing by, Severus and James entered formal courtship. Severus, who was still utterly chaste save his fooling around with James, would remain virginal until they were betrothed at the very least.

They were permitted to spend the evening together without a chaperone though, and James presented Severus with his first courting gift, a beautiful set of paints and brushes. Severus couldn't help but smile broadly at the thoughtful present; while he knew he had a good eye and James had praised his sketching, he had no formal training in art. It was a very much approved talent for a young witch to cultivate though, and had been encouraged by the Princes along with other more 'feminine' skills.

Sending the gift off with an elf to be safely put away, Severus led James out into the formal gardens. James gently shifted his hold on Severus as soon as they were out of sight, from the polite arm offered, to wrapping his arm around Severus' narrow waist. Severus flushed, but didn't resist, instead snuggling closer to James' side. James listened attentively as Severus gave him a softly voiced tour of the gardens, pointing out the more fragrant blossoms and rare plants. When they were in the more secluded areas, James tugged Severus close for deep, drugging kisses that made Severus' head spin.

The entire Potter clan stayed on to supper that night. It was quite the interesting meal, despite that Severus would never have anticipated he had anything in common with the Potters, save his steadily growing affection for James. It was quite enlightening to listen to Lord Potter and Lord Prince debate politics though, especially since their opinions were remarkably similar but they still managed to vehemently disagree about nearly every point raised.

In the morning, Severus received two long sought letters. The first, an acceptance to St. Panteleimon Hospital Healing College in Edinburgh, the second, an offer of apprenticeship with one of the Potions Masters at St. Panteleimon's, Aonghus Ross, who specialized in counter-transformative potions, and had been interested in Severus' recently published paper in *Potions Quarterly* on possible improvements to the recently revealed wolfsbane potion. The contract was included in the offer, and Severus barely looked it over before handing it across the table to Caractacus, knowing by now that all contracts went through him before reaching Lord Prince's desk for full approval.

The rest of August passed fairly quickly. Severus and James saw one another frequently, and while there was plenty of kissing and hand holding, they also studied together and practiced duelling. When Severus visited at Hartsfield, he was sometimes in the company of Remus Lupin, but James carefully arranged things so that Severus and Sirius never crossed paths, as there was far too much resentment and animosity between them for their meeting to end well. Peter was rarely seen by any of his friends, and never by Severus, pleading obligations to his aged mother that couldn't be avoided.

On September first, Severus began classes at Healers College and his Potions Apprenticeship with Healer Ross. James began at Auror Academy the same day, flanked by Sirius Black. Sirius was aware that his best friend was courting Severus, but as he couldn't understand why, he did his best to ignore that aspect of James' life to keep the peace. James appreciated the gesture, and kept his feelings about Severus quiet while at the Academy. He wrote Remus when he needed a sounding board with regards to his love life, despite that Remus was rather inexperienced himself. Still, the werewolf was common-sense, which was often what James needed, as his ideas occasionally got rather grandiose.



At St. Panteleimon's, Severus excelled at his academics, and advanced in his Apprenticeship more rapidly than his Master had anticipated. Even so, it was still a very long year. The Dark Lord was ascendant, and his terrifying raids kept the Healers and their Apprentices in far more practical work than they would have liked. Despite being accepted to the Healers College as a potions specialist, Severus' capability with Defense and the Dark Arts themselves soon saw him adding a specialty in field triage and curse damage. By Yule, he had an Associate Mediwizard certificate and a spot on the Forward Triage Unit despite being one of the younger Associate Medi wizards at St. Panteleimon's. He saw his first action shortly after Yule, on muggle New Years Eve.

Having switched over happily to the Old Calendar when he became a Prince, the fact that it was 31 December by the Julian meant little to Severus, and he didn't mind being on call, as the traditional families had already celebrated New Years at Samhain. Severus was brewing for the stocks, as he often did when it was quiet, when the Healers portkey he wore around his neck warmed. Pulling his charmed notebook out, Severus opened it up and read the orders. Quickly putting his potions under stasis and calling for another potioneer to take over, Severus pulled on the signature verdant green cloak of the Forward Triage Unit and prepared himself for transport.

Taking a deep breath to combat the displacement vertigo, Severus spoke the activation phrase and portkeyed straight into hell. The air was thick with choking smoke and screams, and sizzling with spellfire and free magic. Severus quickly pulled his sterile mask, enchanted to clean the air as he breathed, over the lower half of his face, then began looking over the bodies. Aurors, Death Eaters and bystanders lay mixed together, and Severus treated them as he found them, his dictating quill scribbling away in his notebook as he worked.

Those that died before Severus found them were portkeyed straight to St. Panteleimon's morgue. Rather, the deceased had a morgue portkey attached to them, and awaited transport when the anti-transport wards fell. With those Severus found alive but stable, he left a Healer's portkey set to the intake hall, and a monitoring charm. Those that needed immediate transport he had to carry or levitate through the anti-transport wards, then send them on directly by Healer's portkey.

Severus had just sent his third urgent patient on to the hospital when his instincts screamed at him. He ducked blindly, and brought his wand to bear even as he turned. The Death Eater was masked, so Severus wasn't certain of his (or her) identity. What he was sure of was that despite wearing the Healer's green that should mark him a noncombatant, he was under fire. Severus had survived Hogwarts on the expectation that anyone casting in his direction was an enemy. That paranoia, and his expansive knowledge of offensive and defensive magic, allowed him to not only hold his ground, but eventually incapacitate his opponent despite that he hadn't duelled, except in practice, in months.

Stealing an Auror's prisoner portkey off one of the incapacitated law enforcers awaiting transport, Severus dispatched the Death Eater. That taken care of, Severus headed back into the stifling anti-transport wards to continue carrying the injured out. He continued for three hours, treating and transporting feverishly. He duelled twice more before another shift of field medics arrived, and he was dismissed for the night.

When Severus returned to St. Panteleimon's, he was met by a pair of uniformed Aurors from the Edinburgh office. Sighing, Severus brought them into the locker room and gave his statement while stripping off and showering away the filth of the battlefield on the other side of a hastily conjured privacy partition. It had been a minor skirmish in truth, no more than twenty combatants on each side, but the casualties had been incredibly high due to the use of anti-transport wards and aggressive fire spells. The village of Drumore Wood had been all but wiped from existence.

James was waiting in the receiving hall at Stormholme when Severus stepped out of the floo, and

Severus was immediately enfolded in his strong arms. James was still in his Auror Trainee uniform, sooty and sweaty and the handsomest thing Severus had ever seen. They kissed heatedly, James' square hands pressing down Severus' lean back to cup and knead his firm buttocks. Severus moaned softly, clinging to his suitor.

"I want to pleasure you," James breathed when they parted, and Severus flushed, then nodded. While much beyond kissing and gentle petting was proscribed, the fact that they were officially courting gave them some allowances within the strictures of propriety. Severus led James by the hand to his own rooms. Inside the suite that was Severus', James gently stripped the smaller wizard, kissing and touching him all over, ensuring that any new marks on that golden brown skin were his own. He settled on the sofa, pulling Severus onto his lap, and gently kneaded Severus' bare bum. Severus moaned, and soon James was rubbing his sensitive cleft and teasing his anus.

"Oh, James," Severus moaned, rubbing his lover's muscular brown chest. He slid one hand down further, unlacing James' dragonhide uniform trousers and slipping his hand inside. James groaned deeply as Severus' clever, slender fingers cupped him, then began to tentatively knead and pull. James came quickly, messing his trousers with a moan of Severus' name. Severus' breath hitched at that, and he brought up his hand to taste James' seed as James' sank a single finger into Severus up to the first joint. Severus mewled around his own fingers and came, his anus slicking and clenching in orgasm.

"Let me bathe you little love, and put you to bed. So beautiful my bride, and so courageous. I've been on tenterhooks all night waiting for word of you, but Trainees of my standing aren't permitted into the field, save for mop up duty," James said, dropping kisses all over Severus' thin face. "I've been waiting here since they released us under oath not to seek the skirmish." Severus nodded, wrapping his arms around James' strong shoulders.

"I'm glad you weren't there," Severus said softly, as he was carried through to his ensuite. "I don't know if I could have borne it, finding you in that mess. You've become so very dear to me." James smiled at that, and kissed him, and then placed him in the filling tub. Severus sighed happily. While he had showered at the hospital, a proper soak would do wonders for his stress levels. "The Edinburgh Aurory has requested I consider being more intensively trained in battlefield healing. They know that I would prefer potions and research, but very few who choose the healing profession are willing to fight, and they're desperate for witches and wizards to do both."

"What would the training entail?" James asked, stripping off and joining Severus in the tub. Severus sighed happily as their naked bodies came together, and he began to soap James' broad brown chest, rubbing his tan fingers through the dark, slightly coarse, hair that grew there and circling the darker nipples with his thumbs.

"I would be sent to Auror Academy in London for combat training while also undergoing advanced training in healing Dark magic, curses, shock, trauma, and mind magics," Severus said. "I'm already head of my class at St. Pans' on counter-cursing and curse-breaking. I would also learn ward-breaking at its most basic nature, how to crash a ward and destroy its usefulness."

"Sounds a lot like the Search and Rescue Auror teams that are being formed," James said thoughtfully, his hands moving restlessly up and down Severus' back. Idly he noted that Severus had gained some much needed weight, and his skin had darkened slightly to a healthier tone as well. "They're usually trained in a lot more mediwizardry than a standard Auror team, and know more tracking and ward-breaking as well."

"Well, it isn't my first choice, but I do want to help the war effort," Severus said softly, then moaned as James' strong hands massaged the lithe muscles of his thighs. His legs were quite sore

from so much running about. While he had kept up with his duelling practice, and carried very little body fat on his lean form, Severus had never been one for athletics.

“Let me care for your body tonight, then rest, and analyze the offer,” James suggested. “I can’t say I like the idea of you going into such a high risk field, but I’d be quite the hypocrite if I tried to stop you, and I know better than most just how capable you are in a fight.” Severus flushed prettily at that, and James kissed him thoroughly, then set about washing him up with a number of detours for teasing.

When Severus was clean, and half dozing against James’ chest, James rinsed them both off, then dried Severus and carried him through to bed. Gently laying his lover down, James selected an herby smelling oil and gently massaged Severus’ long, slender legs. He touched the dusky pink rosebud of Severus’ entrance occasionally, teasing the smaller man. Severus moaned softly, sleepily humping the bed.

With a grin, James leaned in, kissing slowly down Severus’ spine. He gently separated Severus’ firm buttocks and blew across his anus, earning another soft moan and twitch of Severus’ hips. Extending his tongue, James licked a broad flat stripe up the crease of Severus’ bum, then set about enthusiastically eating his arse. From the soft mewls and choked swears, Severus heartily approved. James licked and sucked, nibbling gently at the sensitive rim of Severus’ anus, then plunging his tongue inside, followed by a finger. Severus finally orgasmed again as James stimulated his prostate, his anus tightening and slicking beautifully on James’ questing digit.

“Jamie,” Severus breathed, his anus continuing to clench in the aftershocks.

“What do you need sweetheart?” James asked huskily, incredibly turned on by Severus’ pliant trust in him. It was almost impossible to believe at times; even a year ago they could hardly be in the same room without hexing one another or at least trading barbed words. James was so solicitous now, and Severus, while still prickly about emotion in general, melted like wax in the sun under James’ affection.

“Let me fall asleep with you,” Severus murmured sleepily, and James tucked him in, then laid down on top of the covers in the bed next to him. James held his lover close until Severus was soundly asleep, and then kissed the slender wizard softly. Rising, James went to the desk and selected a sheet of fine but unmarked parchment, and quickly wrote a short love note. Leaving it on the bedside table with a conjured rose in Severus’ favourite warm apricot shade, James kissed his little lover once more, then showed himself out. It had been a long night, and while ensuring Severus’ safety had come first, he needed to rest himself.

James called on Severus at Stormholme again the very next night, and Severus blushing led his suitor into the humid conservatory. While they’d fooled around quite a bit while still at Hogwarts, the intimacies of the night before had been their first in some time, and Severus had found that while the sexual aspects were incredible, he was even more aroused by the gentle care James had shown. James too, felt the deepening of the bond between them, although he attributed that to Severus’ growing trust.

## Chapter End Notes

The Prince family motto is taken from the state motto of Alabama. I don’t particularly like the pro-slavery/states-rights gloss of it, but at the same time, that same gloss is

what makes it apt as a pureblood motto.

I base Upper Flagley rather loosely (mostly in location) on the real life town of Ravensworth in North Yorkshire. A reconstructed 'Viking' name for Ravensworth becomes the name of the Prince family's Marquisate, Hrafnswath (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ravensworth>).

The Prince estate of Stormholme is based largely on the real life manor house of Allerton Castle (<http://www.allertoncastle.co.uk>), in North Yorkshire.

The Potter estate of Hartsfield is based on the Cotswolds country homes Owlpen Manor (<http://www.owlpen.com>), Corsham Court (<http://www.corsham-court.co.uk/index.htm>), and Chavenage House (<http://www.chavenage.com>).

# With Hope in Their Hearts and Wands in Their Hands

## Chapter Notes

This chapter has a bunch of things that might make people uncomfortable, although most are mentioned in passing, and not discussed at length. Even so I'll warn you here: There's brief and non descriptive depiction of women being held captive and tortured, mentions of but no depictions of rape, non descriptive magical violence, magical coercion, attempts at non consensual leglimancy, brief references to infertility and possible incest (non graphic), and I'm killing off a large number of my OCs this chapter, but some of them will be sticking around for a while longer.

There's also a fair bit of sex and pregnancy / breeding kink, because I write when I'm ovulating. Aren't you glad I shared that?

Title bastardized from the lyrics of Bricks by Rise Against.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Three weeks after the New Year's Eve skirmish at Drumore Wood, Severus joined James' advanced combat tactics course at the Auror Academy in London. Severus had a lot of catching up to do, but he had always been a competitive academic, and that served him well. It helped also that Severus had impeccable instincts, and knew to trust them.

Severus was soon one of the most feared fighters in the class, both physically and magically. Despite his small stature and lean frame, he was quite strong, and wasn't afraid to use his feet and fists when he was too close in for wandwork. The instructor, noting Severus' physicality, soon began teaching him how to fight both unarmed and with a blade. Severus' main weakness was in stamina, but with concerted effort that too began to improve.

Along with advanced combat tactics, Severus was taking a few other courses at the London Auror Academy, on top of his continued research with his Master at St. Panteleimon's and his courses at the Healers' College. All the Trainees were required to take a physical fitness course, which helped Severus a lot with his endurance, and he also took an introductory warding course that covered both the creation and destruction of basic and commonly used stationary spells, such as anti-apparation and portkey wards, and muggle repelling charms.

Severus' academic aptitude served him well in the warding course, and he was soon top of the class. The other students were jealous at first of his rapid advancement, but his achievements also spurred them on to greater efforts, none of the Auror Cadets wanting to be shown up by a Healer in training. It helped too that the instructors were largely unsympathetic to complaints of favoritism, and would happily read the students the riot act about how many different ways they could be improving themselves instead of whining, then set them running laps until they were too exhausted to complain.

Despite being a student still, Severus' certification as an Associate Mediwizard meant he was called often into the theatre of the battlefield with St. Panteleimon's Forward Triage Unit, fighting with one breath, and healing the next. After a short break at Imbolc, Old Calendar, Severus advanced in his courses. Having topped out of the advanced combat tactics courses, he was asked to serve as a junior instructor on that course, and was advanced in his warding studies to the

intermediate class.

Severus learned more about stationary spells, and about the tricks and traps that could be woven into them. He also advanced in his healing courses at St. Panteleimon's, and on his own time began integrating the two courses of study, seeing if he could unweave a spell before it hit. The academic work was harder as he advanced of course, but Severus was fine with that. He loved solving puzzles and riddles, and untangling the knotty theory of more complicated varieties of magic.

Unfortunately, the change in courses also separated Severus from James in class, which Severus wasn't as fine with. He liked studying with James, teasing him over their notes and dueling in the gym, sneaking kisses in out of the way corners when no one was looking. James wasn't a fan of the separation either, and insisted they go on dates after class to make up the time together.

Severus' muggle wardrobe got quite the workout as he and James explored greater London and occasionally Edinburgh and York. They went to pubs and little restaurants of all types. It always seemed rather an adventure, despite that Severus had grown up half in the muggle world. He'd never been able to afford nights out though, nor had anyone to share them with. Severus and James had to be careful though, as they were both well aware that same gendered couples weren't broadly accepted in the muggle world, and the muggles had their own problems with which neither young wizard wanted to get involved.

Sometimes their dates turned into group outings with acquaintances from either the Auror Academy or St. Panteleimon's Healers College, but generally Severus and James tried to keep their explorations to themselves. While James was quite gregarious and made friends easily, he also treasured his alone time with Severus, and especially his unsupervised alone time. They still met at small wizarding gatherings as well, but it was almost impossible for them to sneak off alone in that environment.

At Midsummer, despite that it had been less than a year since James and Severus began courting, James sought permission from their respective family Lords to pledge his troth to Severus. The Lords Potter and Prince agreed readily, both of them pleased at the match and seeing that their young dependants were well suited. With the war growing ever more violent, and even purebloods being attacked, the Lords Prince and Potter knew it would be best to secure the union, and hopefully the next generation of their Houses.

The betrothal celebration was held just after Midsummer, on Old St. John's Day at the Potter's seat in the Cotswolds. The yellow-grey stone of Hartsfield Hall seemed to glow golden under the summer sun, ringing with the laughter of friends and family eager to forget the war on their doorstep. In days of old, the betrothal celebration of the children of such ancient and esteemed families might have garnered a day's truce. Unfortunately, the Dark Lord, despite spouting traditionalist ideals, put no great store in the survival of the Old Families, especially if they did not support him.

Death Eaters swarmed the Hartsfield wards as the sun sank below the horizon. James and the other Cadets and off duty Aurors there as guests immediately formed into fighting ranks, directing all those able to apparate to safety. Severus turned his attention to the estate's wards, chanting spell after spell to try and hold the enemy at bay, and give the non combatants more time to flee. Despite their efforts, there wasn't enough time. Hostile anti-transport wards snapped into place, and Severus had to turn his attention to trying to disable those so the defenders wouldn't be trapped like so many fish in a barrel.

The remaining protective wards soon crumbled, and Death Eaters seethed into the estate, then the manor itself. James and his friends in the Aurory fought tooth and nail. Soon most of the non

combatants were safely away, but the defense of his homeplace would keep James pinned down and prevent his escape. By the time the dust settled in the dark hours before dawn, Hartsfield was aflame, and only James and his Lady Mother survived of House Potter.

The elderly Hector, Lord Potter had been cut down along with his elder son Lord Charlus in one of the running battles near the outer wardline. James' father, Lord Edmund, and James' cousin, Lord Ignotus, were killed defending the innermost heart of the house, the wardroom where the magic of their family had for generations powered and protected their *demesnes*. Lady Dorea, a Black by birth and Potter by choice, had died the year previous at the hand of her cousin Cygnus' daughter, Bellatrix.

James' more distant cousins, the Shacklebolts, had largely escaped unharmed, but Kingsley, who was the closest to James in both age and affection had assisted in the defense until the end, and was injured as a result. Kingsley's training, as he was already a fully trained Auror, stood him in good stead, and he had comported himself well. The relatively high number of Aurors and Auror Cadets among the guests were probably the only reason that the party hadn't turned into an all out slaughter, although they couldn't prevent a great loss of life.

Like the Potters, the Princes too were decimated in the fight. Peredur, Lord Prince had thankfully not been present, having left the betrothal party early, but the first three Heirs, the Lords Leandros, Aristides, and Wayland, had been killed in the fighting, honour bound to protect a House with which they were so closely allied. Severus had attended to each as he passed, sobbing against the chest of Lord Leandros, the last to slip beyond the veil. Fury reddened Severus' sight when the eldest Heir was gone, and he fought like one possessed until at last the Ministry Aurors arrived.

By the time the manor was cleared, and anti-theft wards raised, Severus was in hysterics and Hartsfield itself was utterly ruined. The elves had saved all they could of the furnishings, popping in and out, and many giving their lives to bring the priceless heirlooms of the Potters and their antecedent families to the safety of Gringotts. A mediwizard sedated Severus, and James, rather in shock himself, carried his betrothed back to Stormholme, flanked by Lord Caractacus and Lady Alina, now the primary Heirs of House Prince. Lord Peredur awaited them in his study, sitting up before the fire with the wireless wheezing softly in the background, the news band quietly relating the night's tragedy.

"Lord Prince," Caractacus said softly, approaching his grandfather and kneeling. The old man wheezed to match the wireless, reaching out to touch Caractacus' singed black hair. They held that pose for a moment, before Caractacus tumbled forward and began to sob in his grandfather's lap. Wrinkled, knob-knuckled brown fingers grasped broad shoulders, and the old man bowed forward, his own weeping silent.

Three days later, Lord Peredur did not wake. The bodies of the 'young' Lords of House Prince had already been cremated, their ashes spread over the rolling hills of their homeplace, their magic returned to the soil from whence they came as was the Prince family's tradition. That morning, Caractacus became Lord Prince, and Severus, his primary Heir. They were Invested before the Wizengamot in a long string of new Lords, Ladies, Heirs, and Heiresses. The Old Families were foundering in this war, despite that it was being waged in their name.

"It is not correct perhaps, by the bounds of polite and traditional society," James said that weekend, Severus' thin, pale brown hand clutched in both of his darker ones. "But I would have you my bride this very month, this very night, if you were willing. The enemy will do all they can to eradicate and eliminate us since we refuse to bow to them and adopt their hateful views. Let us not abandon our love, our hope for a better life. Let us instead cling to one another, let us bind ourselves with the sacred rites, and bring forth a child."

Hesitantly, Severus nodded. The Lady Alina had been gravely injured in the attack on Hartsfield, and while she would survive, she would never bear her own children. Severus' fertility and James' seed were the only hope of continuation of the Prince and Potter blood and magic. Severus had come to quietly thrill at the idea of bearing James' children, but he had never imagined they would be bound so soon.

"I have no robe of red to wear before the altar," Severus murmured softly, for he wished to be bonded in the older traditions. "Nor a robe of white." A red robe was the traditional fashion for the partner who would bear the children, a white robe for a virgin. Severus was eligible to wear either.

"I - I have been through some of what the elves were able to save from Hartsfield," James said softly, his voice strained. "I would be honoured if you would consent to wear the robe of white which was my mother's."

"I would also be honoured," Severus said, knowing how treasured such an heirloom would be with the loss of James' family. "Let us ask my Lord Prince." James smiled at that, and kissed Severus' slender golden-brown fingers, then helped him to his feet. The persistent ache in Severus' chest deepened, as it always did when James was affectionate and solicitous. Caractacus gave his blessing, and so, a few weeks later at the very next new moon, the new Lord Potter, his mother Lady Leonora, Caractacus Lord Prince, Lady Alina, and Severus stood within the old stone circle in the dales above Stormholme.

There, Severus knelt before the altar in his borrowed robes of virginal white silk, the ancient ruby-encrusted golden circlet of House Gryffindor on his dark head. With their decimated but not diminished families as their witnesses, they performed the ancient rites, and then James gently lifted Severus onto the altar itself. They were using a rather frowned upon variation of marriage bonding, but they both desired this, wanting to be tied together as deeply and strongly as possible. Gently James stripped his bride, then began to chant the Rite of Virgin Blood.

With tears in his eyes, James gently but precisely cut small runes on his bride's moon silvered flesh. Rivulets of crimson dripped onto the soft blanket of undyed white lambswool that draped the dark stone of the altar, and then James began to stretch his beloved's tightly furled anus. Severus orgasmed thrice as he was opened, then came again as James' manhood breached him for the first time. He had his fifth and sixth orgasms while James thrust deeply, repeatedly, into him, his anus clenching with pleasure. James' orgasm triggered Severus' seventh, and incapacitated with pleasure, Severus went limp beneath his husband.

Severus woke in the Heir's Suite at Stormholme on the 25 of July 1979, aching and empty between the legs. James was a warm, not-yet-familiar presence against his back, and Severus rubbed against his husband with a soft mewl. James responded sleepily, touching and caressing Severus, opening him, then slowly joining their bodies together. This, their second coupling, was tender and intimate, James breathing all sorts of sweet filth into Severus' ears.

"How long do you think, before you swell with my child?" James asked, as he flooded Severus with his seed. Gently he caressed Severus' belly, petting the soft flat that he hoped to round with his Heir. Severus moaned softly, clenching tight around James, milking him of every life-giving drop.

"Soon, I hope," Severus breathed, and brought James' hands up to his chest. The thought of being heavy with child, his breasts swelling with milk turned Severus on more than he had imagined when alone. The idea of children had scared Severus when he first determined his ability to bear, but he'd been able to read more informative material since becoming a Prince, and wanted a large family. James knew it, and tenderly played with Severus' sensitive brown nipples, twisting and



pinching and pulling until Severus came again, his body trembling with release.

“So beautiful my bride, my beloved,” James murmured, kissing Severus’ ears and neck. Since being accepted and Invested in House Prince, Severus had been growing his hair out as was traditional, and it now brushed past his shoulders in a silken black curtain. James loved playing with it, kissing his head and nuzzling through the silky strands to kiss Severus’ neck.

With the war going the way it was, James and Severus didn’t take a honeymoon. They didn’t take a break at all from their training or their duties. James was more harried than ever, being a newly risen Lord in the Wizengamot as well as an Auror Trainee. Caractacus also stepped up Severus’ political training, knowing full well that he was being hunted for his more moderate beliefs, and his refusal to side with the traditionalists in support of the Dark Lord.

Caractacus’ instincts were proved true just before the Wizengamot’s Samhain Recess. Death Eaters poured into the Ministry Atrium as the Wizengamot was dismissed, spellfire flashing. Caractacus forced his wife into the floo, his own wand dancing. The Battle of the Fountain, as it came to be called, was over in less than half an hour. The next dawn, they consigned Caractacus’ body to the flames, and Samhain Recess was postponed a day for the Investiture of Severus as Lordess Prince-Potter and the posthumous award of Caractacus’ Order of Merlin to his widow, Lady Alina.

That very night Stormholme was attacked. Severus held the wards though, James’ mother and Lady Alina both sealed securely in the heart of the manor. James used his heirloom invisibility cloak and every bit of Auror training and after-curfew-sneaking-about experience he had to disable, disarm, and disperse the attacking Death Eaters. Despite that as a Trainee, James wasn’t supposed to use lethal force, he wasn’t going to skimp in the defense of his lover and their home. Of the ten Death Eaters who attacked, six didn’t survive the night, and the remaining four were utterly incapacitated and would later become inhabitants of St. Mungo’s Janus Thickey Ward. More than one was a former classmate from Hogwarts, and not all of them had been in House Slytherin.

Once the Death Eaters were repulsed, James raced into the manor. He found his exhausted bondmate at the hearthstone, runes drawn all around him in his own blood. Gently James carried Severus upstairs and administered a blood replenishing potion after healing the cuts on his palms and forearms with the chanted spell *vulnera sanentur*. Severus smiled wanly up at his husband, and James kissed Severus thoroughly.

“Please,” Severus gasped, tugging at the lacing of James’ tunic.

“Hush darling, wait a little,” James urged. “I have to speak to the Aurory, make sure our prisoners don’t escape, and reassure mother and auntie, then I’ll come back to you. You’re safe now.” He reaffirmed the last with a deep kiss. Severus gently brushed James’ blood spattered face, whispering the healing spell to knit together the seared flesh there.

“Go, be careful,” Severus urged. James nodded, and he quickly strode off. It took an hour or so to take care of everything, but then he was thankfully back to Stormholme. There had been no additional intruders, and so James went up, practically sprinting the main staircase in his eagerness to be with his mate. He stripped as he entered their room, and Severus woke from the light doze he had fallen into. “Jamie,” Severus sighed in relief, and James leaned in to kiss him deeply.

“Scared me beloved,” James murmured. “Never let you go.” Severus made a soft, indistinct sound, and then James fumbled their clothing all the way off. He rubbed his fingers over Severus’ tight entrance, and Severus moaned softly, spreading his legs and canting his hips up for more. Gently James stretched and slicked his mate, teasing Severus and guiding him to the edge again and again without giving him release.

“Please Jamie,” Severus practically whinged. “Need you, please.”

“I’m here darling,” James reassured, and then he sank into Severus. Severus moaned deeply, clenching tight around the welcome penetration.

“Hard,” Severus gasped breathily. “Please Jamie, need you.” James groaned deeply, his hips beginning to pump. He fucked Severus deep and hard, but slow, savoring every thrust into that not yet familiar warmth, every clench of Severus’ tight body.

“So perfect baby,” James panted. “Merlin, so perfect.” It didn’t take terribly long for Severus to come, and James followed him shortly into ecstasy. “Perfect,” James breathed, and gently disengaged, then cuddled Severus close. He knew he wasn’t the only one who had been frightened. Severus’ desperation spoke for itself, and it had taken some smooth talking to reassure both of the older witches in the house of their safety. But the wards had held, and in the end, James had won.

James earned a large starburst scar across his left proper cheek and the side of his neck, a reprimand, and a note in his file for his use of lethal force, but the reprimand wasn’t harsh in the least, and the other Trainees were quite forward in their praise. Despite that, James decided that instead of being a First Response Auror as he had once intended, he’d rather specialize in Search and Rescue. While it was just as dangerous, there was a lower mortality rate among the Search and Rescue Auror Corps, or SaRACo. James wanted to survive this war, for his husband and the family he hoped to father.

Sirius Black, who had joined the Auror Academy along with his best friend, was rather disgruntled with James’ decision to go on in SaRACo. rather than First Response Auror Corps, or FiRACo. They had quite the row over it, just as they had over James and Severus dating, and later the courtship, the betrothal, and the bonding. Until the full moon when Sirius lured Severus under the willow, Sirius and James had been all but inseparable, rarely disagreeing about anything for more than a day or two. Since then though, Sirius could only see his best mate slipping further and further away, and further and further under the spell of a Slytherin.

That second year of Auror training, James and Sirius were separated into their specialties. Severus trained with the SaRACo. Cadets, which meant he and James had more time together, even if it was spent either duelling or patching one another up. Despite their desires, they were prohibited from being one another’s partners, and for the moment, they were each partnered with a senior SaRACo. member regardless, and assigned to separate squads as was procedure for spouses or siblings serving together.

Severus was of course the best healer of the bunch, but he was one of the better fighters and ward breakers as well, his inborn magical strength and agile intelligence standing him in good stead. It meant their senior partners gave him and James both a bit of a rough time, but they both understood the ribbing was meant to motivate them, rather than tear them down. Severus had gained enough self-worth with help from James and the Princes that he could better differentiate when he was being teased, and when people were actually being malicious.

With dedication, hard work, and Severus’ help studying healing and ward breaking, James was soon right behind him at the top of their Cadet class. Sirius, in FiRACo. school, wasn’t doing as well, and bristled with suppressed anger each time he heard water cooler talk about how well either James or Severus were performing. While their initial courtship had taken many by surprise, Sirius was one of the few who had never gotten over that surprise, and who held the relationship against James. Most on their side of the war were simply happy that the Potter and Prince lines, both old and respected, had a chance to carry on in the next generation, and that the two powerful young wizards hadn’t sided with the Dark Lord.

Samhain arrived before too long, and James and Severus, in leathifold robes so dark they swallowed light, performed the Old Rites in honour of their Blessed ancestors and more recent decedents. It was a difficult night for them both; they had lost so many in this past year, and the veil visions were thick in the room when they lit the hallucinogenic henbane incense. Severus had a long and much needed conversation with his mother though, and James spoke to his near idolized father, and well respected uncle and grandfather, all of whom reassured him that he was strong enough to carry the line forward, so long as he kept the recklessness to a minimum and paid proper respect and care to his bonded partner.

The two young Lords sat vigil until dawn broke the darkness and dispersed the gathered shades. Then, exhausted, they went to bed. They curled together naked, just holding on. After a while, Severus began to speak softly, for the first time confessing what James had suspected; that his home life had been utterly miserable save his friendship with Lily Evans, and unbearable once that was taken from him.

James gently held his love as Severus silently wept for his mother, and for his childhood. If James wept too, his tears were hidden in Severus' silky black hair. Severus wept until he was dry, and then fell into a restless slumber. James remained awake, soothing away the nightmares that haunted his beloved. Nightmares, he was sure, named Tobias. And Sirius and James.

The confession left Severus feeling almost impossibly light the next day. He had no obligations anymore, save to his House and to his Lord Husband, and those were duties he was rather proud of and pleased to have. His father had beaten it into Severus that he was nothing, would always be nothing. Now though, he was a highly lauded SaRACo. Healer Cadet, the bonded consort of a powerful young Lord who adored him, and Lordess in his own right of an ancient and respected house.

The feeling of happiness dissipated like a popped soap bubble though, when word came in mid November from St. Mungo's Healers' College that one of their own was missing. While Severus would worry at least a little any time a missing person was reported with the war going as it was, he worried more when the missing person was Lily Evans. They had never fully reconciled after fifth year, but that didn't mean Severus had stopped caring about his first childhood friend. That she, a well known muggle-born witch, was missing, didn't bode well.

Lily remained missing for well over a month, and Severus' fear for her grew with every passing day. James, who had nurtured a crush on her for a long time but never truly been close with her, sympathized, but couldn't do much else. At least, not until their training group was seconded to the cadre of SaRACo. that was actively on search duty for in-the-field exercises. Lily wasn't the only one for whom they were searching, but her name was on the list.

When they found Lily at the end of November, Severus wasn't sure if he were pleased or not that he was on the actual search team. Working with Emmeline Vance and Hestia Jones, both Trainees as well, and Aurors Ned Crockford, John Dawlish and Gerhardt Gamp, they were following up on a tip from an informant about a possible Death Eater safehouse. Severus, Crockford and his trainee Vance crashed the wards hard and fast, and then they were swarming inside.

Severus and his mentor, Gamp, got the third floor, and swept it silently, before Severus erected hasty wards to prevent anyone from re-entering. They bypassed Crockford and Vance, who were just finishing the second floor, when Jones shouted from the ground floor. Leaving the first floor to Vance and Crockford, Severus and Gamp raced down to help Jones and Dawlish break the secondary wards and enter the basement.

As soon as the wards were down, they could hear, and smell, the prisoners. Wands at the ready,

they crept down the rickety steps. Lily and five other muggle-born or half-blood witches were shackled in the cellar, marinating in their own stale sweat and putrid excrement. They shrank back uniformly from the wizards, and Severus' heart broke a little. Severus exchanged a look with Gamp. They all knew that Severus was the best Healer in the squadron.

"I know Miss Evans, have since we were nine," Severus said quietly. "She might let me close without a stunner."

"Try. If Miss Evans will accept your help, and the others can recognize it, they might as well," Gamp suggested. Severus nodded, and approached Lily, speaking in soft, low tones, telling her that it was okay, that her Very was here to help her, that he would fix everything. Lily's fever-bright green eyes slowly sharpened into true awareness, and she moaned something like his name.

"I'm here, I'm here Lily," Severus promised, and gently gathered her into his arms, carefully casting diagnostics. He felt the blood rush from his face as the list of damage scrolled out. She had been roundly cursed, but there was a marriage-by-abduction bond registering as well, and a pregnancy. Severus grimaced, then sent the results of the scan to Gamp. Gamp nodded, reaching up and taking hold of the amulet around his neck. Gamp whispered a few words, then snapped the amulet in half. A Forward Triage Unit would arrive soon from Mungo's to take over.

Severus visited Lily in the hospital a few times, but never quite knew what to say. When Lily checked herself out against Healer's advice, Severus wasn't too surprised though. She'd always been terribly independent, sometimes to her own detriment. Severus wished he could help her, but he didn't have an address for her anymore, or even a floo direction. They'd lost all contact after graduation, and Severus had never regretted it more.

"Jamie?" Severus asked the night Lily left St. Mungo's against the Healers' advice, curled against his husband and idly playing with James' wiry black chest hair.

"Yeah sweetheart?" James murmured sleepily, well sated after their coupling.

"I want a baby," Severus said, his voice tiny in the stillness.

"I know sweetheart," James said, pulling Severus in tighter and kissing his temple.

"I don't - why aren't I pregnant yet?" Severus asked disconsolately, and James' heart broke a little. According to his checkup prior to adoption as a Prince, Severus was exceptionally fertile, and the way their magic reacted when they were together seemed to indicate that James was his perfect match. They had half expected to be expecting within a month or so of their bonding.

"I don't know baby," James said softly. "Do you want me to have a checkup? We know you're fertile, but I've never had my seed checked, since most of my family followed the older, stricter consanguinity rules from before *The Sacred 28* was published. Still, I might need a little help," he admitted. It wasn't unusual in pureblood wizards, to have trouble fathering a child, especially if the mother or bearer was also from an older family like Severus was. Given he'd been a late in life child for his parents, and an only child, James guessed that there was likely a family history of fertility issues.

"Please?" Severus requested softly. "I know we've only been trying a few months, but I - I just worry."

"Don't sweet bride, you know that worrying will only make it take longer," James soothed. "I'll go to the Healers this week, alright sweetheart? Make sure I'm not just shooting sparks. Remember though, that even if I don't need help, it sometimes just takes a little while, even though fertile

wizards usually take more quickly than witches.” Severus nodded with a flush, then leaned up to kiss James sweetly.

“Take me again? Just to be safe?” Severus half teased, worrying his lower lip. James growled softly and rolled, pinned Severus to the bed and frothing against him. Severus moaned eagerly, splaying his legs to cradle James’ hips and rubbing up in counterpoint.

“Such a sweet little bride,” James murmured, then reached down to caress Severus’ buttocks and test his anus. Finding Severus still wet and relaxed from their earlier coupling, James carefully aligned himself, then sank in until he was fully sheathed in Severus’ body. They both groaned softly as they joined, their magic rising through the bond and tying them more tightly together. “Gonna make such a sweet little mother,” James murmured reassuringly, and set about pleasuring his husband.

As promised, two days later James had an appointment with a very discreet Healer specializing in what many politely referred to as ‘wizards issues.’ It was more than a little embarrassing to sit there in his pants and undershirt and ask whether he could father children, despite that it was a fairly common problem. Even more embarrassing was urinating in one cup, and ejaculating in another. The Healer did the tests right in front of him though, then destroyed the samples to ensure they couldn’t be used against James. When it was all finished, a weight James hadn’t even realized he was carrying lifted; he was fertile, he could give Severus the children they both so desired.

Rather to James’ surprise, he learned when he reported the findings to his husband that night in bed that Severus had seen a Healer as well. As fertile males were fairly rare, the literature wasn’t always very helpful. Much of what was written though, was about the Princes, as due to their high concentration of fae blood, they boasted the highest instance of male fertility in a single family line in the British wizarding world. The Healer had checked Severus over carefully, and found him in perfect health, if a little stressed and tired. It wasn’t either of their faults, it just wasn’t their time yet, James reassured Severus, and Severus finally accepted that.

The guerilla war they were fighting for British magic had eased a bit as winter slowly settled in. It seemed the Dark Lord was as reptilian as some who had seen him claimed, and didn’t much like the colder weather. As an Auror and a battlefield Healer, James and Severus were as busy as ever, although they were both glad when their cases weren’t directly related to the Dark Lord and the threat he presented.

Unfortunately, they didn’t reach Yule without some conflict. It was just December when the all-hands siren sounded in the London Aurory. Severus cocked his head where he had been working in the station infirmary, prepping stocks as was his usual pastime during downtime. The speaker coughed to life, and then he heard the low, growling voice of Alastor Moody, the Senior Auror this shift.

“Now hear this, now hear this,” Moody’s voice crackled. “We have reports of spellfire at Hogsmeade. This is an all hands alert. Ready for portkey by station in five. Repeat, spellfire at Hogsmeade, this is an all hands alert. Ready for portkey by station in five, four, three, two,” Moody barked. As soon as Severus had heard the Senior Auror say ‘now hear this,’ he had known it would be an all hands alert, and so he quickly called for a replacement, then threw together his field bag and swirled his Healer green cloak around his shoulders. By the time Moody hit ‘four,’ Severus was ready, and a few moments later he activated his portkey and was transported to Hogsmeade.

Knowing he was likely the senior Healer reporting in the first wave since it was a Saturday, Severus immediately found a fairly safe location - the Hog’s Head Tavern - and set up a triage

station. He fired up the green caduceus that denoted this a Healer's stand and therefore neutral ground, then got to work. The first injuries he saw were fairly minor, but it was a Hogsmeade weekend, and Severus knew it would get worse before it was over.

They were soon joined by the Scottish Aurors out of Edinburgh, and included among them were more senior Healers from St. Pant's. Severus was relieved of the stationary post, all of them knowing he was of greater value in the field. He nodded, ensured he had both his wands, his knife, and his battlefield potions as well as his Healing notebook and dictating quill, then slipped through the alleys towards the epicenter of the fighting. He treated as he could as he went, but soon he was fighting more than Healing.

"Well, who have we here," a somewhat familiar and entirely unwelcome voice asked as Severus crouched around a corner, catching his breath. His heart caught in his throat as he looked up into the familiar, if partially masked face of Archibald Avery. Archie had been the year above him at Hogwarts, and they had been moderately friendly, or as friendly as anyone had bothered to be with Severus in those days. "Little Lady Prince." Severus bristled, fingering his wand as he double-checked their surroundings. "The Dark Lord's heard of you. You're lucky you're worth more to him alive," Avery sneered, and Severus' stomach lurched. That couldn't possibly be a good thing.

Avery raised his wand slightly, telegraphing his next move, and Severus exploded into action. He cast silently as he jerked to one side, and then his wand was dancing. Avery was a formidable fighter. But he wasn't trained to the degree that Severus was, had picked up all his skills in the fight itself, and that made him slightly sloppy, open to mistakes. It took what felt like ages but was really only a minute or two, but finally Avery slipped up, and left his side open. Severus twisted his wand just so, and a healing spell could break bone as surely as it mended. Avery collapsed with a pained groan, his ribs snapped in a clean line all down his side.

Incapacitated, Avery was soon sent off to the triage stand, or rather, a secondary triage that had been set up for transporting injured prisoners. As soon as that was taken care of, Severus was back in the fight. He was quite glad of his timing when, across an intersection, he saw James desperately holding off two Death Eaters at once. One was the already infamous Bellatrix Lestrange, who had killed James' aunt, Lady Dorea. Fury flooded Severus' system, and contrary his usual method of operating, he attacked without bothering to study the situation.

Soon Severus and James were back to back, Severus taking on Bellatrix's brother in law, Rabastan Lestrange, while James continued his duel with the mad witch. A sudden wash of power flooded the battlefield, and James hesitated slightly, allowing a curse to break through his defenses. He grit his teeth against the pain though, returning fire accurately.

"It's the Dark Lord," Severus said, his voice pitched low so only James could hear. James nodded silently, trying to figure how they'd get out of *this*.

"Let's hope Dumbledore gets here soon," James said darkly. The Headmaster had gained a reputation as the only wizard that Voldemort feared as the war escalated, and Hogwarts as a place of refuge and safety.

"I'm surprised he isn't here already," Severus panted, continuing to duel. James nodded sharply in silent agreement. It *was* odd, they were just down the hill from the school after all, and it was obviously a Hogsmeade weekend for the students. Severus had already treated quite a few of the students. James would have thought Dumbledore would be there almost immediately.

"My Lord!" Bellatrix crowed.

"Shite," Severus breathed, and managed to disarm Rabastan. Before he could capture the Death

Eater though, Rabastan apparated away with a terrific *CRACK!* and a swirl of black smoke.

“Shite,” Severus growled a second time, and guarded James’ back and flank, helping him turn the duel against Bellatrix. They didn’t have long though, before the Dark Lord was at her side.

Voldemort was as ugly as rumour had whispered, Severus thought. The Dark Lord was incredibly pale, what Severus could see of his complexion almost grey-greenish, like curdled milk. He had no distinguishable nose, and his eyes burned blood-crimson. He kept his hood raised, but Severus didn’t think the man had any hair left. He was extremely tall and broad shouldered, with arms that were slightly too long, and large, spidery, long fingered hands. Severus shivered, duelling at his husband’s side.

“Ah yes, the Lords Potter and Prince,” Voldemort hissed, and Severus’ insides turned to ice. Severus maintained control and fought, but his heart was stuttering in his chest. He had put Avery’s threats aside as idle intimidation, but it did not bode well at all that the Dark Lord actually knew who they were. Granted, both their homes had been attacked before, but somehow that seemed less personal, as masked Death Eaters had performed the raids, not the Dark Lord himself.

“A pureblood from an old and proud line, and a half-blood who could be so very prized, and yet you defy me, and your place in the world I would build,” Voldemort threatened, and Severus grit his teeth.

“*Sectumsempra*,” Severus hissed almost silently, a spell he hadn’t used in years, having deemed its effects too deleterious for casual duelling. He incanted with feeling though, and the Dark Lord hissed in pain and retreated a step, bloody eyes flashing with ire as a wound opened across his chest, seeping dark blood.

“*Crucio!*” Voldemort countered, and Severus managed to avoid most of it, but couldn’t help his short cry of pain as the red spell light clipped him in the side. “So the little Princess has claws does he?” James derailed the next spell before it could be formed, abandoning his fight with Bellatrix to fire a powerful stunner toward Voldemort. Rather to all their surprise, the Dark Lord couldn’t block or counter it, the spell was cast so quickly.

Voldemort’s crimson eyes widened almost comically before he went stiff as a board and began to go over backwards. Unfortunately, Bellatrix grabbed him as he fell, and apparated them both away. All around the battlefield, the remaining Death Eaters apparated as well, vanishing in flares of black smoke and brimstone, some of them shooting up the feared Dark Mark as they escaped.

“Saint Mungo’s socks,” James swore, blinking. “I fucking hexed Moldyshorts.” Severus snorted softly, then turned to his husband, quickly and deftly healing a cut bisecting his dark eyebrow before hugging James fiercely. It would balance the earlier sunburst scar on the other side of his face; certain spells just couldn’t be healed cleanly, no matter the skill of the Healer.

“That’ll scar love,” Severus murmured, then went up on his tip toes to kiss the wound. James grinned, pulling Severus in for a proper kiss and another tight embrace.

“We just fought Moldyshorts and came out the other side alive,” James said with a face splitting grin. Severus’ couldn’t help but smile in response, his heart swelling with affection. They were filthy and bloody and the Dark Lord knew their names. Despite that, Severus had never felt more in love, more desirous of a family to share with his incongruous, incredible wizard.

“And now he’ll be after us even more,” Severus countered with a small, wry smile, and the grin fell away from James’ square-jawed brown face immediately. “Don’t you dare,” Severus said, seeing where James’ mind had turned. “I will not be a prisoner in my own home. I fought him too Jamie. I won’t let you shut me away,” he warned, wagging his finger in James’ face. James sighed,

because that *was* what he was going to insist upon, that Severus resign his position in SaRACo. and perhaps research from home.

"I know you've plenty of fight baby," James said, kissing Severus' extended scolding finger, then turning to look over the smoking village, his arms banding tight around Severus' narrow waist. "I just - it would about finish me to lose you sweetheart."

"And you think I don't feel the same?" Severus asked, a faint thread of hurt coloring his tone as he pushed away slightly too look up at James. James immediately felt the heat of shame flood his face, looking down at the strong line of Severus' proud nose and his high, dirt-streaked brow, the pale green medical mask hanging loose around his slender brown neck, dark hair coming loose from its plait and sticking to Severus' sweaty golden-brown skin, his thin lips pursed with displeasure. No, trying to protect Severus like that would be a terrible idea, James acceded silently, and he pulled Severus back into an embrace. From the start Severus had insisted he didn't need saving, and while James sometimes disagreed, he never did so out loud.

"I don't think that at all darling," James insisted. "I know you're capable, and that you love me. But *you* know that logic and I are only passing acquaintances." At that Severus smiled slightly, and gently smacked James on the arm.

"Go get looked over mister big hero, I see a few others that need to be herded to the triage station," Severus said kindly, glad they wouldn't have to argue about it. He kissed James once more, adrenaline still pumping through him, and then turned to get back to work. James watched him go for a minute, admiring his husband's grace and composure, then obeyed. He was mostly unhurt, but he'd taken a few glancing curses from Bellatrix. He made sure to mention to the senior Healer though, that Severus was still in the field, but had been clipped by a *cruciatus* from the Dark Lord himself.

It was late before they returned to Stormholme that night. Severus had begrudgingly agreed to be treated in the field, although really he hadn't been hit badly, and there wasn't much that could be done for the after-effects of *cruciatus* other than potions or marijuana for the pain, the marijuana being more effective and less addictive, and therefore Severus' preferred treatment. They had debriefed for hours at the Aurory, and then, as they were leaving, they were met up with and more or less commandeered by Albus Dumbledore.

"Ah, James, dear boy," the Headmaster had greeted them. "And young Mr. Snape!"

"You'll find it's Prince-Potter," Severus returned coolly, wanting to go home and sit for at least an hour in a well oiled and salted bath, and harbouring a great deal of resentment towards the man who had let him be bullied and ostracized for so much of his school career. If James hadn't protected Severus that last half year at Hogwarts, it would have just been more of the same. Dumbledore had never lifted a finger to help.

"Yes, yes, of course," Dumbledore said amiably, hand-waving away the correction in a manner Severus couldn't help but find patronizing. "Come along, come along." James and Severus traded a look at that, silently debating. But Dumbledore was powerful, and they knew he stood against the Dark Lord, even if he had been absent that afternoon. So James smiled encouragingly to Severus, and took his hand. They followed the old man into the floo, and to Hogwarts.

"Tea?" Dumbledore asked kindly, addressing James, but not Severus, as he caught up the voluminous sleeves of his aquamarine robe in his thin, pale hands.

"No, thank you, we can't stay long," James said coolly but politely, not best pleased at how his husband was being ignored. The last term of school had opened his eyes, let him see just how



disparate the treatment of favorites like himself was from that of the rest of the students. James conjured a comfortable loveseat and gently pushed Severus into it, then conjured a matching footstool. Severus glowered - rather adorably, James thought - but reclined slightly and put up his feet. "I presume this is about the skirmish in the village today?" James asked, settling at Severus' side and entwining their fingers.

"Yes, most distressing," Dumbledore said gravely. "The last Hogsmeade Saturday of the term," he said with a sigh. "Only a few hurt though, nothing Madame Pomfrey couldn't handle, and thankfully no deaths."

James and Severus both hummed softly. It was true Madame Pomfrey had come down to help at the triage station when the battle was over, and escorted the injured students back to the Hogwarts infirmary, but it was the Forward Triage Units from St. Mungo's and St. Panteleimon's who had been in the thick of the fighting, saving lives, and the Aurory who had put their lives on the line battling the Death Eaters. As an Auror and a Mediwizard respectively, James and Severus weren't terribly impressed by the slight. Some of the students had been hurt quite badly; without the triage station, there easily could have been deaths.

"Most unfortunate I was in London," Dumbledore went on, then trained his pale, gimlet eyes on Severus for the first time since they'd sat. "They say you fought Voldemort."

"I wasn't just going to stand there and let him curse me," Severus said in a rather affronted tone. His northern accent came through strongly in his weariness and indignation, although he generally didn't guard his speech as closely now that he was no longer a Hogwarts student.

"No, no, of course not. I hear you drew blood, even," Dumbledore pushed, and Severus felt the brush of another mind against his. Since becoming a Prince he had learned the mental arts, and he slammed his already high mind-shields up fully. Dumbledore rocked back slightly in his seat, blinking owlishly.

"Stay out of my head," Severus hissed. "Jamie, I'm ready to go home now," he declared, and stood.

"Now now, let's not be hasty," Dumbledore chided gently, as if he hadn't just tried to rape Severus' mind.

"I'm afraid we really should be going," James said coolly, his nose wrinkling into a slight sneer that was rather unpracticed on his usually open face. "I don't take kindly to attacks on my husband Headmaster, and we're both in a less than charitable mood tonight given the earlier - unpleasantness. I'm sure you could speak to one or another of your - friends - in the Aurory to get a fairly accurate account of the duel." With that, James, led Severus to the hearth.

"I really must insist," Dumbledore said firmly, and they were reminded rather forcefully that he had been the wizard to defeat the last Dark Lord that threatened England, as the Headmaster's magic pulsed around them. James and Severus were frozen in place at first, and then an inexorable pressure turned them slowly and led them back to the loveseat that James hadn't bothered to banish. They were soon sitting stiffly, fuming silently.

"Now, you must agree that a war cannot be fought without information," Dumbledore said, back to his kind tones and grandfatherly twinkle, as if he weren't holding them against their wills, his magic stifling as it kept them pinned to the loveseat. "And you two make up a very large percentage of a very small group; those who have faced Voldemort at crossed wands, and lived."

"He insulted my husband, threatened us both, lost some blood to Very's spell, clipped Very with

*cruciatus*, taunted Very, then fell to my *stupefy*, was there anything else?” James ground out irately. “That’s about all you need to know.” Severus managed to grab James’ hand then, and murmured an ancient phrase in *sidhe*. A flash of light, and they were portkeyed back to Stormholme by Severus’ Lordship ring.

“Oh, praise Fortuna!” Lady Alina cried, rushing into the receiving room and hugging both of them. “It was all over the wireless that there was an all hands alert to Hogsmeade and You-Know-Who himself showed up!”

“He did,” James confirmed. “Let’s go sit, so I can tell you and mother at the same time.” Alina nodded, and they were soon sitting around the smaller dining table in one of the many parlours as James and Severus told of the afternoon’s battle, and then Dumbledore’s interference. They both knew the old Headmaster was a dangerous enemy to make, especially since it was clear that the Dark Lord was already hunting them. But James didn’t have the same respect for the man he once had after talking through Severus’ school experiences, and that didn’t even begin to account for Dumbledore’s rudeness to Severus today.

“I know you don’t go out a lot to start with Auntie Alina,” Severus said quietly but nervously when they’d explained.

“Don’t worry my love, I’ll not leave the house without an emergency portkey on my person,” Alina promised gently. “I’m still in mourning anyway, I doubt I’ll have call to go anywhere any time soon.” Severus nodded, reaching over to take his aunt’s hand. They might not be blood relatives, but they were the last Princes, all that remained of that once proud House, just as James and his mother were the last Potters.

“We already have all our Yule shopping done, anyway,” Mother Potter said with a warm smile, and Severus smiled back at her. She really was a wonderful woman, and Severus absolutely adored James’ mother.

“Speak for yourself,” James teased, and Severus laughed softly, which was half of James’ intention.

The time until Yule was blessedly quiet after the Hogsmeade attack. There were a few smaller raids, but the First Response Aurors handled those, and fairly admirably. Severus was often on standby when the FiRACo. Aurors were deployed, but thankfully there were no major injuries or deaths. The Princes and Potters spent Yule quietly at Stormholme. The weekend before, James went out and cut them a handsome tree, and the four of them decorated it together, the elves taking care of the rest of the manor.

On Yule Eve, James, Severus, Leonora and Alina bathed in purified waters, then changed before sundown into their celebratory robes. The elves had already laid by everything they needed for the vigil and feast, so Alina and Leonora set up the altar, showing Severus how. It was the role of the ‘Lady’ of the manor after all, to see to religious observances.

They sat vigil all night, and then, with the coming of the light at dawn, lit first the great central hearthfire, then every other hearth and candle and lamp in the house before performing the Yule ritual. When they had finished, they settled at the hearth and told stories and hopes, and broke their fast. Neither Alina nor Leonora stayed up much longer; they would exchange presents and have another feast in early afternoon, and the Ladies would sleep until then.

Severus and James stayed up a little longer, but before too long, they fell into bed. At first it was simple kissing and touching, soft caresses and comfort. Soon though, James was sheathed in Severus’ warm and welcoming body, undulating his hips shallowly to drive them both to

unimaginable ecstasy. Lit with sacred fire, they came together repeatedly that morning, and as Severus was breached one last time, he was certain he felt the burst of inner heat that meant he had been impregnated. With a soft sob, Severus came, grasping James' hand and pressing it tight against his lower belly.

"You've put a child in me," Severus gasped, and then came again, impossibly pleased by the prospect. James groaned softly, flooding Severus with semen and magic.

"Ugh, blessed mother," James gasped. "Bless this child, bless my sweet bride, who carries my longed for Heir." Severus purred happily, writhing against James. "We'll tell Mother and Aunt Ali over supper. I know you want to work until the last possible moment, and you'll know which Healers will be best for you to see. But I want every precaution possible."

"You wanted every precaution possible even before I fell pregnant," Severus teased warmly, and James laughed softly.

"Oh darling, you make me so very happy," James murmured, nuzzling against Severus' dark head. "So beautiful, and I know I'll only desire you more as you swell with my child."

"Oh husband," Severus said fondly, clenching tight, and James groaned deeply. "I know I don't say it much, but I *have* come to love you Jamie." James smiled fondly at that.

"And I you, my sweet bride," James returned in a fond if teasing tone, kissing Severus' ears and neck. "Rest now my darling." Severus hummed softly, and they fell back asleep feeling rather pleased with themselves. When they came down for supper, they announced Severus' possible pregnancy, and the elder witches immediately proposed innumerable rituals and spells to protect both carrier and child. So it came to be that the next new moon, not long after his twentieth birthday, Severus lay upon the altar, naked as the day of his own birth, with Leonora and Alina chanting over him, his skin painted with oils.

## Chapter End Notes

Next week and the week after I'll be at my parents house, and their wifi isn't terribly reliable. I will try my best to update on schedule, but if I apologize in advance in case I'm unable to.

# Stop and Begin this Moment

## Chapter Notes

This chapter mentions the possibility and availability of abortion in passing, as I imagine would apply in this world and time. Hopefully I managed this in a manner that won't offend anyone, regardless of where you stand on the issue. Also, there is a birth scene in this chapter, I don't think it's terribly graphic, but this is your warning if that makes you squeamish. Please do not expect medical accuracy here. Everything I know about pregnancy and home birth comes from watching *Call The Midwife*, googling, wikipedia, and talking to my sister, who had her second child at home.

Title from the song Begin, by The Wailin' Jennys.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Due to his slender build, Severus began to show by the second month of his seven month pregnancy. He remained in good health though, and his pregnancy Healer had no cause to restrict him from working. So despite the swell low on his abdomen, Severus continued to apparate and portkey into battle, praying to all the gods and his Blessed ancestors that he might save a few lives.

As James had predicted, he only wanted Severus more as Severus rounded with pregnancy. Severus didn't gain much weight overall, the stress of the war and his training sapping his appetite. As a result, Severus' 'baby bump' was that much more pronounced, although he also showed some of the other effects common to gravid witches and wizards. His hair grew quickly, and was thicker and shinier, and he had the 'glow' which was almost literal among pregnant magical persons. His magic went a bit wonky along with his hormones, but not enough to keep him from his work.

While others might not understand Severus' drive to keep working even while pregnant, they couldn't deny he was needed. Severus left unspoken his own deep-seated desire to be useful, to be necessary. He knew that he often went into situations that were dangerous for both himself and his unborn child, but that need to be needed was very hard for him to resist.

Severus worked in the field right up until the fifth month of his pregnancy. As May gave way to June though, he became simply too unwieldy and exhausted to be navigating battlefields. The male body was simply not designed to carry children, and while magic could modify and ease some things, it did not solve all. Severus' discomfort, and his fear of being a burden, made Severus generally ill tempered and snappish, even with James.

Despite Severus' irritability, James was in impossibly high spirits. He was going to be a father, and he was done with Auror Academy as of the first of June 1980. There was a big celebration with an incredibly boring speech about their obligations to society in these darkening times. James noted Dumbledore off to one side, clearly making mental notes as to the graduates. James didn't doubt there was at least a couple spies for Voldemort in the crowd as well.

Restricted to desk work not long after James' graduation, Severus turned to research full time, reading up on both the werewolf curse and the effects of *cruciatus*, which was much in use among the Dark Lord's followers. He did some Healing in the hospital, but most of the time he was in the library, either at St. Panteleimon's, Stormholme, or Mortlake in Surrey, where the great Alchemist

John Dee had made his home. It was just as well; while Severus had advanced his Associate Mediwizardry certification, and was now a full Mediwizard, he had to complete a thesis and a certain number of hours with patients before he'd be a fully certified Healer.

On a visit to Mortlake, Severus was rather surprised to see Lily. Although they had begun to speak to one another again after James and Severus started dating openly, they remained somewhat stiff and untrusting with one another. With magical children so few and so precious, getting an abortion was almost impossible, so Severus wasn't surprised to see that Lily carried the child that had been fathered on her while she was held prisoner. She would have to carry to term and then put the child up for adoption if she didn't wish to raise the child herself.

"May I join you?" Lily asked, taking the decision of whether to initiate contact from Severus. She gestured at the other chair at the large, rectangular table on which Severus had his work spread.

"Of course," Severus murmured, pushing the chair out a bit with his foot. "You - how are you?" he asked awkwardly, not sure how to open, and Lily smiled tightly.

"I've been better," Lily admitted with that ill-fitting grimace still on her face. "But then, I've also been a lot worse," she said with a huff of unamused laughter. "The - the baby is healthy, and so am I, and that's about all that can be asked for. I - I wake up screaming most nights that I actually manage to fall asleep."

"I - is - is there anything I can do?" Severus asked tentatively. "I - I mean - I know we - we haven't much spoken in a long time but I - I still - I still care for you a great deal Lily. You are - were - my first, my best and only friend for most of my life."

"Oh Severus," Lily sighed. "I - it's my own fault we've not spoken. I should have accepted your apology the first time, but you know me and my bloody temper and stubbornness," she said, chagrined, and Severus let out a low, breathy laugh, stealing a glance over at her through his lashes. She looked tired, but good. Her pale tan skin had the same pregnancy glow Severus sported, and her coils of auburn hair were dressed attractively, styled in glossy curls and piled on top of her head, restrained with a bright green and gold band.

"I forgave you a long time ago Severus," Lily said honestly with a tinge of regret. "And I - well, leaving Hogwarts opens your eyes, doesn't it? Half the reason I persisted in my bloody mindedness was the encouragement of some of my housemates. But once we're out of that tiny, insulated bit of our world, into the great big mess of it, well, I know very well you couldn't have avoided your dorm-mates entirely, no matter their intentions, inclinations, or what have you.

"I owe you just as much of an apology as you ever owed me, if not more, and what's more, you've been the more magnanimous person since. When I was sniffing at you and turning up my nose like a perfect little snot, you were always so terribly polite to me, if a little stiff, which I can't fault in the least given how *I* was behaving. I know you came to see me in the hospital, and I didn't even write a thank you note!"

"Goodness," Severus breathed, raising his eyebrows, and Lily giggled softly, then leaned across the broad table awkwardly and took one of his slender hands in both of her smaller ones.

"I *am* sorry Very, and I should very much like to put things right. I know it'll take work, but I'm game, if you are?" Lily said hopefully, and Severus smiled warmly and nodded.

"I should like that as well," Severus said softly. "Although, take with fair warning that I am Lordess Potter now, so you'll have to put up with James. He - he's grown up a great deal, even since we graduated, and he'd already grown up significantly during seventh year, or I shouldn't

have dated him in the first place,” he said, his smile growing and warming as he spoke of his husband, his tone warming with affection.

“You really do love him, don’t you?” Lily said fondly, and Severus flushed adorably and nodded.

“I do,” Severus all but whispered, then squeezed Lily’s hand, looking up with a broad grin. “Oh Lily, he’s so very wonderful to me, and so kind to my poor auntie. The only - I only regret that he is so very lonely without Black to prattle on at, as Black won’t speak to Jamie except to say rude things about me and how I’ve enchanted him or dosed him with some dark and dangerous potion, which invariably puts Jamie in such a snit. But James is getting on well with Frank Longbottom, who just finished the Academy, and is your friend Alice’s husband now, and Kingsley Shacklebolt is also in the Aurory; they’re both James’ cousins, although the relation is distant.”

“Yes, I know Frank,” Lily said with a smile, which soon dropped away. “Black is - is he really awful to you?”

“I only see him in passing at the Aurory,” Severus said dismissively. “He’s in the First Response Corps, and James and I are both Search and Rescue - SaRACo. James keeps trying to mend things, he can be terribly persistent when his mind is settled on something, as you well know. But each time Black is rude and prejudiced and it makes James horridly upset. I couldn’t ask him not to try though. It doesn’t help that last I heard, Black wasn’t doing well in training, he just wants to get in the field and hurt people from what I hear, which isn’t - well, it isn’t what Jamie wanted to join the Aurory for, in any case. I’m technically not an Auror, just a Mediwizard seconded to SaRACo., but I’ve had to do a lot of the Auror training to be allowed in the field.”

“I thought about that,” Lily said, fiddling with her papers. “I know I *could* fight, I just - I don’t especially *want* to, which I’m sure is horribly unGryffindorish,” she said with a slight grimace.

“No, you’re just fighting a different way,” Severus argued gently. “This is our battle as well,” he said, gesturing at the research piled about them. “Maybe not so glorious as charging into the skirmish, wand blazing, but Healers are an indispensable part of the fight. Who else will patch up those glorious hard chargers when they’re bleeding from their eyeballs, or they’ve got tentacles growing out their ears or somesuch other bizarre curse damage?”

“You’re right of course,” Lily said with a slight smile.

“As I always am,” Severus answered, with a put on supercilious tone and a sniff, and, as he had hoped, Lily laughed softly.

“Oh, I *have* missed you Very,” Lily said fondly. “You’ll have dinner with me, won’t you? It won’t be much, but I’ve learned how to make a mean curry, I think you’ll like it. Unless well - you aren’t one of those odd people that stops eating spicy food while they’re pregnant, are you?” she asked with a glance at his swollen belly.

“Heavens no,” Severus laughed. “I’m sure I drive the elves mad, constantly asking them if they wouldn’t just put a bit more pepper in this or chili in that. Spicy is fine. I hope you’ve something vinegary as well. I’ve been mad for pickles of any sort this past while.”

“That’s the beauty of a good curry,” Lily declared. “You can have any sort of thing with it. I’ve some Indian style pickle that goes with it particularly well - cauliflower and carrots and a kick of garlic and ginger. If you like it, I’ve got a few spare jars, you could take one home with you, along with the curry recipe if you like it.”

“That sounds lovely,” Severus sighed. “I’ll floo Mother Potter and Auntie at lunch so they know

not to expect me. James is always horridly late, and eats out with either Kingsley or his squadron now that I'm not there to drag him home at a decent hour." Severus paused, taking a deep, somewhat shuddery breath. "I do worry about him," he admitted. "He's very good at what he does, but he - he *will* rush in without thinking, that bloody Gryffindorish recklessness." Lily laughed, but squeezed Severus' hand companionably in commiseration.

They finished out the afternoon in quiet companionship, and took the train back into London, where Lily had a small flat. Lily started the curry, although Severus soon joined her at the counter, and before long they found the old rhythm from potions class, Severus cutting the ingredients and Lily adding them to the pot. By the time they were sitting at her kitchen table, they were laughing happily as they talked of more peaceful times and sipped at chai that was more warm milk and honey than actual tea. As they would both be continuing their thesis research for a time, they agreed to meet at Mortlake again in the morning, and sit together. After all, innumerable homework and research assignments at Hogwarts had been spurred on with their ability to help one another along.

Dinner in the evening became a habit, and soon Lily had all but moved into Stormholme. Although she never saw James due to his long hours, Lily got on well with his mother Leonora and Severus' aunt, Alina. As their due dates approached, Severus began pressuring Lily to move in fully. He was the Lord of the manor after all, and desperately wanted Lily safe. Now that they were friends - or at least friendly - again, and both soon to be mothers, he vowed to be intransigent on this matter.

It was mid July before Lily gave in, but she did eventually give in. She gave her notice on her little rented flat, and the Prince elves packed everything away for her. Her clothes and books and necessities would come with her to Stormholme, and her shabby second hand furniture was sold off. James had been warned, but was still rather surprised that evening to come home and find Severus and Lily gabbing over each other while they knit, Leonora and Alina watching bemusedly.

"Hallo then," James said with a slight smile. This more animated aspect of Severus had become rarer as the war dragged on, although it had never been common. James promised himself then and there he'd do nothing to imperil Severus and Lily's friendship, if it encouraged Severus' more gregarious nature.

"Jamie!" Severus greeted with a smile, and half rose.

"Uh uh," James chided, striding forward. He gently urged Severus back into his chair, and gave him the kiss he was likely after as well. Severus hummed happily into the intimacy, raising a slender hand and stroking it through the stubble above James' ear. Despite that he was now Lord of his line, James abstained from the traditional long hair. It wasn't terribly practical for an Auror, after all, and so he kept his hair closely cropped on the sides but a bit longer on top, which resulted in it sticking up every which way.

"Good day at the office dear?" Severus teased, and James laughed softly, settling into a chair and calling for an elf.

"I survived, it's always a good day at the office when that happens," James teased somewhat morbidly. "Would you ladies like tea? Anything?"

"Tea, and some of those meringues," Severus said, his eyes sparkling.

"Oh, and those lovely butter biscuits," Lily requested hopefully. "And something with chocolate."

"Ooo, yes," Severus agreed, then glanced at Lady Leonora and Lady Alina.

“A bit of madeira for me love,” Leonora said fondly.

“I’m fine with tea and biscuits,” Alina promised, and the elf, who had been standing by, popped off to prepare the trays.

“Merlin, I don’t know how I rubbed on without elves all these years,” Lily sighed, shifting as she futilely tried to find a more comfortable position.

“Aren’t they lovely?” Severus agreed. “Oh, Jamie,” he said, turning back to his husband. “Healer Rancic came today, it’s definitely a boy, so you can abandon all those girls’ names you were thinking of,” he said rather smugly.

“I should know by now you’re always right,” James said with a smile. “I did so want a girl though.”

“You didn’t know already?” Lily asked.

“Little bugger wouldn’t turn into the right position for the scan to show,” Severus said with a smile, rubbing his rounded belly with a slight air of possessiveness. He was obviously somewhat amused at his son’s uncooperativeness.

“Stars, I’ve known mine was a boy nearly since I learned I was pregnant,” Lily said, and Severus shrugged at the more than slight exaggeration.

“Well, it is a Potter,” Severus teased, looking fondly at James, who snorted softly, then let out an appreciative sound as he quaffed a healthy mouthful of lager.

“It is,” James agreed smugly, and Lily snorted, then dissolved into laughter. Severus followed her a moment later, and James grinned broadly, the last stresses of the day washing away at the sound of Severus’ soft giggles - although, of course, Severus would claim he was chuckling, not giggling - *never* giggling. “Evans, I don’t know how or why, but I’m in your debt. Severus hasn’t laughed this much in ages, and I know it’s not entirely my doing,” James said with a smile, and Lily giggled, but smiled back.

“We all need our families with us more than ever,” Lily said softly and more seriously, still smiling but the expression taking on a slightly wistful edge. “Severus’ suffered my stubbornness more than long enough. My pride simply wouldn’t let me seek him out. I’m glad to see him so happy. No one deserves it more,” she finished fondly, and when Severus opened his mouth to argue, she gave him her patented look of doom. Severus promptly closed his mouth, and then descended once more into laughter.

Lily had been wary of Severus’ and James’ relationship when they were still at Hogwarts, and she had half expected it to fail. There seemed to be just too much bad blood between them, so many old disagreements and hurts, and while she knew just how unconditionally Severus could love, she also knew how long he could hold a grudge, and how viciously he could enact revenge. But seeing them so open together, so obviously in love, was rather a revelation. Severus had been well aware of her earlier disapproval, and so her blessing meant a great deal to him now that they were friends once more.

“The more things change,” Severus managed to get out around his laughter. “Oh, Red, you haven’t given me *that* look in years, and I still haven’t lost my instinctive fear of your temper.”

“And rightly so,” Lily sniffed, and then she was laughing as well. “Oh,” she said suddenly, and quieted, her hand splaying across her belly. Her lips moved, silently counting. “Nope, just



kicking,” she said, then shifted. “For a moment I thought this baby boy of mine might be coming to join the party.”

“Now wouldn’t that cap off the day,” James said with a grin, and the others laughed. The five of them sat up a bit longer before they went off one by one to bed. James watched his mother carefully; she was getting old, and had been frail since losing his father.

“She’ll pull through,” Severus murmured warmly, rubbing James’ back. “She wants to see her grandbaby born at the very least.”

James nodded grimly, and took Severus on up to bed. Tomorrow, they would start again. When James rose, he kissed Severus softly, but let him sleep, knowing his partner didn’t get enough rest. This close to the due date, the baby was weighing on Severus heavily. By the time James dressed in his uniform and took breakfast, Severus had come down in his house coat, a pretty printed silk frivolity that Lily had given him some weeks back, soon after the resurrection of their friendship.

Approximately two weeks later, Severus woke in the night, shuddering. A soft gasp sounded in the darkness a few moments later, and then he was reaching over and roughly shaking James awake, then snapping the wax wafer of the charmed amulet his Healer had given him. Within minutes, James had the rest of the house awake, and the elves were preparing the Lord’s Suite for use as a birthing chamber. The birth Healer and assisting mediwitch arrived soon after, and Lily took her place as doula at Severus’ side.

“I think I might be right after you,” Lily admitted when they hit the fifth hour of Severus’ labour. He grinned ferally, breathing through his steady, painful contractions. By the time they hit the seventh hour, dawn had risen on the last day of July. “Come now, you want to be delivered before Lammastide, don’t you,” Lily teased when noon came but it still wasn’t time for Severus to push. The sun eased down below the horizon, and the Ladies of the house set out the vigil items upon the altar, then returned to the birthing room, where Lily had begun labouring as well.

“It’s time Severus,” his Healer finally directed, as Lily screamed in pain, pushing with all her might. Severus reached out, seeking Lily’s hand. Their fingers tangled together, and Severus gathered his magic as he had been taught and been practicing. His abdomen was a concentrated ball of fiery pain, and he fought through it to surround his son in his magic. He took deep, rhythmic breaths, steadying his heartbeat and respiration into the cadence his son set. Lily screamed, and Severus *pushed*, and his son appeared in a flaring corona of magic on his stomach, amniotic sac, placenta and all, even as Lily’s son slid out from between her legs.

“Merciful Merlin,” Lily’s Healer murmured, and then reached down to gently cut the cord as Severus’ Healer opened the amniotic sac and lifted his son out.

“Hadrian,” Severus whispered as his son was passed into his arms. “Hadrian James Lierion Prince-Potter.”

“I’ll let his father know,” Leonora murmured, leaning down to kiss Severus’ brow and then releasing Severus’ other hand and slipping from the room.

“I - I shall need a paternity test before I name him,” Lily said softly, and Severus squeezed her hand gently. The Healer nodded, face grim. They all knew why Lily needed the test done. The mediwitch soon brought the potion, and a snip of the baby’s downy black hair was put in.

“This is the more vague variety I’m afraid,” the Healer said, capping the vial and shaking it rapidly while keeping an eye on her watch. “It will only identify by family. You’ll need something of the father to determine paternity for a certainty.” With that, she stopped shaking and uncapped the vial.

A puff of greyish smoke rose from the agitated liquid inside, forming a shield.

“House Black,” Severus identified immediately.

“Regulus then,” Lily said softly. “His disappearance was in the *Prophet* about a month before Yule, and his father’s obituary just after. He - I believe he is the one - he was gentle with me, as much as he could be.”

“I - James and Black are no longer friendly, but I - there is a bond of blood there. James’ Aunt Dorea was a Black. If - if you wish, we could try and speak to Regulus’ mother, Lady Walburga, on your behalf?” Severus asked hesitantly. Lily didn’t have the chance to answer before James flew into the room, eyes blazing with joy. “Your son and Heir, Lord husband,” Severus said fondly. “Hadrian James Lierion Prince-Potter.”

“Hello Hadrian my love,” James cooed, leaning down to kiss the baby’s thatch of curly black hair, then Severus’ mouth. “We make beautiful children,” he murmured. Severus hummed, then laughed.

“Antares,” Lily said softly at Severus’ side. “Antares Henry Evans - for the moment.”

“He is Regulus’ son,” Severus told James quietly. “Could you speak to Lady Walburga? I - I do not know how she will take it, but I know - Reggie was her favorite, and knowing there is some piece of him left in this world may ease her heartache a little.”

“Bless, I shall write her immediately. She would be on the list to know of our Hadrian’s birth regardless,” James said. “Alright there Evans?” he asked.

“Just fine,” Lily said with a smile. “Just think, another generation of Potters and Blacks heading off to Hogwarts together.”

“Only this time they won’t be spoilt prats who think the world entire ought to bow before them,” Severus said, giving his husband a fond glare.

“I wouldn’t dare love,” James said, raising his hands in submission, and Lily giggled softly. “Now, I shall go get samples of birth announcements as soon as the engravers open up, and you can decide which you like.”

“There’s a sample already prepared on my desk,” Severus said fondly. “All filled out to be sent to Scrivenshaft’s, save the name and date.”

“Of course there is,” James said with a smile, and Severus smirked.

“You can bring me samples after you drop it off though,” Lily piped up. “I’ll only need fifty count or so.”

“Hold off until I can talk to Lady Walburga,” James advised. “If she and Lord Black acknowledge the baby as a Black and Regulus’ legitimate Heir, you’ll need a lot more than fifty, and the name announced might be different too.” His eyes dropped back to his own child as he spoke, and he reached up, gently tracing Hadrian’s cap of black curls. “He looks like you love,” James murmured.

“Poor bugger,” Severus murmured in reply, and James chuffed softly, then leaned in, kissing Severus’ temple.

“I rather like the way you look, my love,” James chided gently, and Severus gasped softly as

Hadrian gummed at his dark, swollen nipple. James laughed softly, at that, stroking the boy's back. "Will he be able to," James asked, gesturing vaguely at Severus' softened chest.

"Possibly," Severus said with a shrug. "It might take a few days for my milk to fully come in if it does, but I'll know before then if I'll be able to breastfeed. I should have premilk soon, within the hour, if my body is able to lactate," he said quietly, his eyes fixed on his son in wonderment. "Hello little Prince," he cooed, holding the baby to his small breast. Little Hadrian fussed a bit, then latched on. For a moment, it was only painful, Hadrian gumming at the tender flesh, but then Severus grinned as he felt something inside give way.

"I think I'll be able to breastfeed," Severus said happily, and they could all hear that Hadrian was suckling. "From the journals, it sounded as if most of my ancestors who were fertile were also able to lactate." James nodded, mesmerized by the sight of his son feeding. Hadrian was still flushed beneath his brown skin, noticeably a bit mottled and pinkish; his tiny hands balled into fists, the rest of him carefully swaddled into a violet blanket with the enjoined Prince and Potter crests embroidered at each corner.

"Hungry little bugger," James murmured.

"This getting born business is hard work," Lily interjected, watching her own son feed with an expression of awed tenderness, and James laughed softly.

"You two did the hard work, don't think I don't know it," James said. "They're both beautiful. And I'd best get started on a letter to Lady Walburga." With that, he kissed Severus on the forehead, then showed himself out. Severus and Lily traded a look, rolling their eyes, and then admired each other's sons. Both Hadrian and Antares soon dropped off, and Severus urged Lily to remain in the bed. His birthing process, although much longer, had been far less impactful on his body, and so they swapped bedrooms, as each of them had laid in a bassinet and necessities.

For about twenty four hours, the babies were quiet, only fussing a bit. Lily and Severus both woke every two or three hours to put their children to the breast as was suggested, Alina and Leonora making sure the rest of the house ran optimally. It was the third day when Lady Walburga arrived, Severus startling quite sharply as he felt an unfamiliar wand pressed to the gate wards asking admittance. Ten minutes later, he, Lily, Alina and Leonora were all in their best robes, sitting stiffly in the best parlour.

"Lady Walburga, be a welcome guest in my home," Severus said softly. "Respecting thou who longs for mine gifts and mine house." The ancient words invoking the ritual guest-friendship that would be formalized with the guest's ritual reply.

"Lordess Prince, I welcome your friendship during my stay," Walburga responded formally, curtseying stiffly. "Longing for thine gifts and thine house."

"Please," Severus said, gesturing for her to be seated. As a fertile male, he inhabited a strange, liminal space in their society, neither male nor female and yet both. As host, he was not supposed to be seated when there was a woman standing. As a new mother, he wasn't supposed to rise for anyone save the Merlin himself.

"My nephew writes my son, Regulus, fathered an Heir out of wedlock prior to his disappearance?" Walburga asked, not bothering to come at the situation in a roundabout manner.

"He did Lady Walburga. You'll excuse my rough speech, but the child was fathered upon an unwilling mother, during a time when she was held against her will on the orders of one we dare not name," Severus said, opting for similar straightforwardness, and Walburga blanched.

"I - I had feared he supported that asinine cause," Walburga admitted. "Such is my House shamed. That my eldest son be a blood traitor and malcontent, and the younger an animal - a criminal."

"Lady Walburga, he did not - the man I believe to have been Regulus was as gentle as he could be with me in my time of difficulty. He was the one, I believe, who ensured we were not left without the attention of someone capable of healing, and when he - he was also as gentle as possible when - when he fathered the child," Lily said, her voice strained and delivery halting.

"At times he - he would speak to me, knowing that I had in the past had dealings with your elder son, although we were never friends. I - I believe he regretted his decision, and may have been the one who ensured that the Search and Rescue Aurors found us. It is - it is my belief that he went missing trying to leave the service of the one we dare not name," Lily finished, and Walburga was by then openly, although silently, weeping.

"Our scans upon finding Miss Evans also indicated that she was the object of a completed, and strong, marriage-by-abduction bond," Severus said quietly.

"I had not investigated the bond, for fear of whom might be named my abductor," Lily said. "But when I came with child I knew I would have to eventually, so I might give my son a father if he or his House be willing."

"You have given me two great gifts then," Walburga said. "A grandson, who shall be my legitimate Heir, and Heir of the Lord Black, and hope that my - my boy - my beloved boy died a free man."

"Should you like to meet your grandson Lady Walburga?" Lily asked kindly.

"I should. And I should also like you to call me Mother Black. We shall say you and Regulus eloped in secret, and the goblins shall not argue that. And you shall come with me when you are strong enough to travel, to Grimsthorpe, which is home of the Lord Black. We are all gathered there, for London is no longer safe, even for us," Walburga said. It would be a believable lie; Lily had been bonded to Regulus through a marriage-by-abduction, and no one could contest that even if they didn't have any type of formal contract.

"I should like to get my hands on this malcontent. Tom Riddle, that is his name, no matter what else he may call himself now. A swotty, charming, calculating lad when we were at Hogwarts, and a criminal even then," Walburga went on in her wavering, querulous tone. Severus blinked, then turned to his aunt and mother in law.

"I remember the lad," Mother Potter said darkly as Alina shook her head in negation. She hadn't gone to Hogwarts, Severus remembered, and was rather younger than Walburga and Leonora. "I tried as I could to keep the older boys from giving him a rough time; it couldn't have been easy for him, in Slytherin with a muggle name and secondhand robes," she said almost regretfully, and Severus felt a cold shiver of dread wash through him. *That could have been me*, a tiny part of his brain whispered. *But it wasn't*, he told himself firmly. He might have sympathized slightly with some of the anti-muggle views trumpeted by future Death Eaters, but he was no killer, no rapist or torturer.

Walburga stayed on to supper that night, and Severus extended to her an open invitation to come back as she pleased, although he didn't key her into the wards. Leonora and Walburga, after a bit of tenseness, got on quite well, and Walburga proposed bringing some of the other Blacks to visit once they were brought into the loop. Severus consented hesitantly, but did consent. Lily would need as much family as the Blacks were willing to offer.

Over the next few days and weeks, Walburga was frequently back and forth. She brought various members of the Black family with her when she came visiting, including the elderly Lord Black. All of them were handsome, with pale, Celtic complexions, curling dark hair, and stormy grey eyes. Little Antares already fit that mould almost perfectly, save he had inherited Lily's moss green eyes once they settled from newborn blue, and it was likely his skin would tend more toward olive than milky. Antares had wild black hair though, not unlike Hadrian, who had the characteristic coils of Potter hair already, although in Severus' darker shade of blue-black rather than James' dark mahogany.

Magical travel was discouraged for children less than seven months of age, so Lily would remain at Stormholme until then at the very earliest. She visited Grimsthorpe occasionally, but left little Antares at Stormholme with Severus when she did, not wanting to endanger her son. It was much more common that the Blacks would come to visit at the Prince-Potter residence, and the two families drew closer as a result.

Their next most frequent visitor was James' distant cousin, Kingsley Shacklebolt, with whom James served in the Aurory. Occasionally Kingsley would bring along their other cousin, Amirah Zabini, but she had given birth within the last few months as well, and wasn't inclined to travel much, plus she lived in Italy with her husband, and they all agreed it was safer for her to be there than in war-torn England. The last of the Shacklebolt cousins, Aurora, was still at Hogwarts, and more interested in her university applications than visiting with her distant cousins. The Shacklebolt elders were quite wisely encouraging her to continue her studies abroad, possibly in Rome since the family Amirah had married into had connections there.

When Hadrian was three months old, and after much debate, both internal and with his husband and their friends, Severus sent his resignation from St. Panteleimon's Forward Triage Unit. James had his work as an Auror still, but they wanted one of them to be a full time parent, and Severus' potions apprenticeship and Healer certification weren't contingent on his position at St. Pants. It ensured that one of the parents would be home, and Severus could still conduct his thesis research for both potions and Healing from the manor.

"Would you like to learn the animagus transformation?" James asked one evening when he'd got home from the Aurory, gently rubbing one of Severus' slender feet. "Many, but not most, find that their original *patronus* takes the shape of their animagus form. It's true for me - part of why I was so interested when I saw that silver hind of yours. They say that complementary *patroni* are a good indicator of - compatibility." Severus laughed softly, shifting carefully so he didn't wake their son, who had fallen asleep nursing.

"It would be a nice thing to research," Severus quietly agreed. "A good card to have hidden up my sleeve as well, although it would only be good for running, unless I was a bear or something. If - if I may ask - I don't recall seeing that on the curriculum at the Auror Academy?" he asked, breaking off, and James nodded. It wasn't something James had learned as an Auror, but at Hogwarts, although he'd never before mentioned the ability to Severus. James pulled away, then deftly pushed back the furniture with his wand, and with a strange blurring and shifting, a melanistic fallow buck stood before Severus. He was magnificent, massive, with a broad span of velvet covered antlers and pelt that gleamed dark seal brown with good health.

"Blest mother," Severus breathed, reaching up to stroke James' lowered snout, then card slender fingers through his velvety fur. He gently hugged James-the-hart's neck, then stroked the soft velvet of his palmate antlers before settling back, again stroking James' dark brown nose. "And you want to teach me how?" Severus asked, and James snorted, then shifted back to human. "That's rather impressive," Severus admitted. "However - why did you?"

“We learned so we could accompany Remus on the full moon. He found - having other animals with him kept the wolf sane, kept him from harming himself,” James explained with a shrug, flushing slightly and uncertain how better to explain. Severus was well aware of how much James treasured his friends though, and this was only more proof of how far James would go for those he loved.

“You know I’ve forgiven you, and him, that. It wasn’t either of your faults in the first place, that was all on Black,” Severus chided gently. “And how is Lupin? I thought since he was doing his Defense Mastery I might see him at Mortlake’s Library, but neither hide nor hair in the few months Lily and I were haunting the place.”

“I - Dumbledore has up a group to fight against You-Know-Who,” James said, then grimaced slightly. He had at one point been invited to join said group, but when he had pressured for Severus to be included as well, Dumbledore had become markedly less interested. “No one will hire Remus since he’s had to register as a werewolf, so he goes on all sorts of dangerous missions for them.”

“Stars,” Severus breathed, eyes widening slightly. “Well, I know you miss having Black about, but you ought to know I don’t begrudge you your friends. Next time Lupin’s back from one of these secret missions, invite him here. I don’t have much experience with werewolf specific healing practices, but I can certainly read up before then.” James’ smile turned instantly into a blinding grin.

“You delightful man,” James praised, and knelt beside Severus on the sofa to kiss him thoroughly. Severus kissed back happily. He could never get enough of James’ kisses, James’ affection.

“Black’s been grumping about him, saying that we shouldn’t trust him since he’s a werewolf and so many have gone over to You-Know-Who, but Remus is one of the most loyal people I know.”

“I trust your judgment Jamie,” Severus murmured, rubbing his husband’s broad shoulder. “And I know you’re not - not perfectly happy without your old friends, as close as you’ve become with Frank and Kingsley. If you can have Remus here with you, and that makes you happy, you know I’d do nearly anything don’t you? To make you happy?”

“Oh Very,” James murmured fondly, and kissed Severus again, slow and deep and thorough. Severus mewled softly, aching to be bedded. Gently, James shushed him, then lifted little Hadrian and called for an elf to put the baby to bed. Their little one safely tucked in, James led Severus to their room, and there, slowly, thoroughly, ravished him. Severus was a very willing participant, moaning and clinging to his husband and orgasming untouched from the intense pleasure of James filling him.

Exhausted from the birth of their son, and taking care of him, Severus hadn’t been interested in sex since Hadrian was born a few weeks past. Now though, with James filling him, pleasuring him, Severus mentally berated himself. Being under James, being taken care of like this was an integral part of their bond. It felt good, better than good, and Severus became more willing with each deep thrust.

“Let’s never go that long without sex again,” Severus murmured sleepily when they lay tangled together, limp and sated. James laughed softly, kissing Severus’ face softly.

“As you wish beloved,” James murmured, and Severus smiled and drifted to sleep with a ball of warmth deep in his chest. He woke in the middle of the night to feed Hadrian, but the reconnection with James made him far more even tempered about it, and he cooed at their son gently as Hadrian suckled. Hadrian fell back asleep nursing, and Severus gently burped him, then tucked him back in and settled back into bed with James. James curled him close, and with a soft, happy sigh, Severus fell back asleep himself.

“Love you sweetheart,” James murmured in the morning, as he kissed Severus awake.

“Love you too,” Severus answered sleepily.

“Go back to sleep baby, just wanted to let you know I’m off,” James said quietly.

“Be safe Jamie,” Severus murmured. “Healer Rancic and the pedi-Healer are coming day after tomorrow.”

“Regular well-baby check?” James asked.

“Mmm-hmm,” Severus agreed. “Antares and Hadrian, and regular post-delivery check for me and Lil.”

“Alright sweetheart. Make sure we haven’t jumped the gun,” James suggested, fondling Severus’ soft penis and then brushing a fingertip over his perineum towards his crease. Severus flushed slightly, but nodded. It was unlikely, since giving birth hadn’t necessitated any changes in Severus’ body, but it was worth checking. By the time James slipped out the door, Severus was asleep again, although only lightly. The moment Hadrian woke, Severus would be up to feed his son.

## Chapter End Notes

Mortlake is / was a real place, and really the home of John Dee, who was Elizabeth I’s court magician in real life, and who I headcanon as being a muggleborn.

The wording for the guest-friendship ritual welcome is modified from the Homeric Hymn “To Guest-Friends,” translated by Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

# Of Friendship and Love

## Chapter Notes

There's a fair bit of talk about Sirius in this one, but he doesn't really appear yet, and it's other people talking about him, not him voicing his own motivations. I tried not to outright bash Sirius, but I'm not sure how well I succeeded. I'm an admitted Snape fan, but I don't dislike Sirius, so sometimes that's a hard dynamic to navigate. Don't worry, Sirius will be redeemed (and get to speak for himself) eventually.

Sorry for the day late update, I was at a family party yesterday for much of the day and traveling all day today.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

With the babies so young, Severus and Lily mostly just carried them around in slings while they either read or walked in the gardens. Severus got to know his best friend all over again with both of them in the house all the time, and grew closer with Alina and Leonora as well. He also met and became at least acquainted with the various Blacks who came to visit Lily and Antares. Most of them were quite the conversationalists, although much more traditional than Severus was accustomed to.

When it got to be too much at times, Severus would carefully wrap Hadrian up in the sling and go for long walks out on the Dales. He was so used to being active, and he knew that his being a stay at home parent was a great boon to the family, but there was a war going on, and it was very easy to feel useless. Worse, as James grew more experienced as an Auror, his hours increased, and on top of that Dumbledore started dragging him off to meetings of the Order of the Phoenix again.

James begged out of what he could, but Dumbledore made it very difficult to say no. Severus theorized that since he hardly left the house, Dumbledore assumed that he and James weren't as close or trusting of one another as they had been when they were first married. It wasn't terribly logical, but Severus had discovered that James' lack of logic was actually fairly standard among wizards, no matter how strong or clever they might be otherwise.

Every time Dumbledore managed to corner James, James would come home fuming. Severus found it somewhat amusing at first, given his own long standing resentment of the Headmaster, and James' previous near blanket acceptance of the aged wizard's decrees. But as an Auror, James could see a lot left to be desired in Dumbledore's hodge podge organization, although he could also acknowledge that given the corruption rife in the Ministry, an outside force probably *was* necessary to adequately combat the Dark Lord.

Even so, every meeting of the Order of the Phoenix that James attended was subsequently hashed over by all of the Princes and Potters resident at Stormholme, along with Lily. Lily and Alina both had outsiders' perspectives, although in different ways, and Leonora brought her decades of political experience to the table, along with her lifelong knowledge of the magical world and how it worked. Severus had an inbetween perspective, but more importantly a healthy measure of skepticism and paranoia.

A couple months after Severus and James first discussed it, James dragged Remus Lupin back to Stormholme after one of his meetings with Dumbledore and the Order. James was growing rather



disillusioned with his former Headmaster, and trusted him less and less. Dumbledore had kept him after the meeting and tried to pump him for information about his own son Hadrian and his godson, Lily's Antares. Considering how closed mouth Dumbledore was with giving out information, and how he had treated Severus in the past, James was understandably leery of saying much.

Thankfully, James was home before too long, Remus at his side. The babies were already in bed, and as Lily was still staying with them, James kissed her on the cheek in greeting after he had greeted Severus with a thorough kiss on the mouth. Severus, as always, melted helplessly against his husband, not even caring that Lupin was staring wide eyed at them. Panting gently, Severus withdrew, murmuring a soft thanks to their ancestors and household gods that James had once again come home safe.

"Remus Lupin, be a welcome guest in my home, friend," Severus said softly, invoking the ritual guest-friendship. "Respecting thou who longs for mine gifts and mine house." Remus visibly racked his brain for the correct response, then gave it in a tentative voice. "Please, you must be hungry," Severus pressured, gesturing that their guest ought be seated. "Any true friend of my husband is welcome in our home." Remus gave an awkward little half bow, and sat, and a moment later an elf popped in with supper trays for James and Remus and tea for Severus and the women.

While James and Remus ate, Severus and Lily chatted amiably about their days. Both of them had returned to researching, Severus still looking into anti-transformative potions, and Lily researching spells which might alleviate short term nerve pain and ameliorate long term nerve damage. Her Healing concentration was on the after-effects of the *cruciatius* curse, which was very popular among the Death Eaters. Severus had worked on the problem himself for a while, before accepting that any potion to combat it would be so expensive as to be useless for the general populace, and focusing back on the Wolfsbane. When Remus learned that Severus was working on potions for werewolves, he just stared, gobsmacked.

"But I've been so - horrid," Remus stammered finally. Severus flushed softly.

"I won't pretend the thought of coming across you, or any other werewolf, transformed doesn't terrify me," Severus said, his low, quiet voice even despite his own lingering fears. "That's part of why I'm doing this. But intellectually, I also understand that your lycanthropy - it isn't your fault. It's a disease, and not one I would wish on anyone." James leaned over and pulled Severus into a deep kiss at that. Severus surrendered eagerly, plastering himself to James as he kissed back.

"You two are so adorable," Lily teased as they parted, and Severus flushed, burying his face in James' chest.

"Hey, I can't help it I married someone so totally awesome," James said, stroking Severus' back gently and then beginning to play with his loose hair. Severus melted into James' arms, but turned his head to blow a raspberry at Lily, who laughed softly. Severus' didn't move from his place plastered against James' side until it was time to go up to bed, and he and James went hand in hand. They only stopped on the way to look in on the babies, and kiss both Hadrian and Antares goodnight. Once inside their own bedroom, James pulled Severus into a more heated kiss, running his hands possessively over Severus' slender form.

"Need you," James murmured, and Severus nodded, not that he often refused his husband. James smiled lustily, then gently undressed Severus, kissing his neck and shoulders and soft little breasts, then lifting him and laying him on the bed before shedding his own robes. Severus moaned softly as James approached. James was barechested, wearing only the cordovan red dragonhide breeches of his Auror uniform. The laces were being rapidly undone, and his erection was pressed against the placket, the head peeking over the top of the waist, almost plum purple and dripping with

desire. Severus felt his anticipation grow, and spread his legs in offering, reaching down to hurriedly stretch himself.

“Leave your trousers on,” Severus panted, fingering himself, and a moment later he was full of James’ erection. He moaned eagerly, wrapping his legs around James’ trim waist. James chuckled softly, hitching Severus’ hips closer and caressing his full bottom. Severus, James knew, had varying sexual needs. When Severus arched his back and tossed his head as he was now though, James knew his little love needed a deep, thorough claiming, needed to feel utterly overpowered and ravished. James did his best to always gave Severus what he wanted in bed.

By the time James finished inside him, Severus was a limp, semen-soaked mess. He felt fantastic though. Even better, James gently cleaned them up by hand, then cuddled and caressed Severus until he fell asleep. The intimate aftermath of their more explosive joinings always made Severus feel incredibly well loved and cared for, a feeling he cherished above almost all others.

“Morning sweetheart,” James murmured when he woke the following morning to find Severus watching him. Severus’ dark eyes softened with affection, and James pulled him down against his broad brown chest. “Need you baby,” he murmured. “So eager last night, so hot. I want to get you pregnant again.” Severus moaned, leaning up to kiss James deeply. When they parted, he rolled onto his belly and then lifted his hips up in offering. James groaned deeply, fisting himself briefly, then pressing into his eager mate.

“You know I’ll give you as many children as I can, as you want,” Severus moaned, and James grinned.

“I know baby. Merlin you’re so hot sweetheart. So ready for me, so wet and open,” James murmured. They both enjoyed dirty talk, especially when it emphasized Severus’ wantonness and willingness to be bred. “I’m going to put a baby in you. Make you heavy with my child,” he panted. Severus moaned and came, clenching on James’ penis.

“So good Jamie,” Severus moaned. “Please, breed me, please, feels so good.”

“I have you sweetheart,” James soothed, slowing his thrusts. He shifted them both so they lay on their sides, the position they had used when Severus was swollen with child. James banded one arm low on Severus’ hips, then reached up with his other hand to play with his tender, swollen breasts. “Such a sweet little mother. So eager for my seed.”

“Yesss,” Severus hissed, and came again. “Breed me, please Jamie. So hot for you. All I want.”

“I know sweetheart, I know,” James murmured, and sped his thrusts. He managed to make Severus orgasm three more times before he spent himself, flooding his sweet lover with his seed. Severus moaned softly, urging James’ hands down low on his belly. They’d been going at it like minks for the past few weeks, but Severus was fairly certain he had felt the warmth of impregnation this last time. “Pregnant?” James asked hopefully.

“I think so,” Severus answered breathlessly. “You’ll have to take me again tonight just to be sure,” he teased with a smile, and James growled, tumbling Severus onto his back and kissing him thoroughly.

“So sweet beloved,” James murmured. “Such a beautiful little mother.” Severus flushed prettily, and as suggested, that night they mated eagerly. It would take a week before the charm could confirm a pregnancy with certainty, since it determined on implantation rather than fertilization, but Severus performed it hopefully every morning before he dressed. A week after he felt the telltale warmth low inside him, the charm told him what he had suspected the past seven days. He

was again with child.

Severus smiled all day, humming softly to himself as he went about his work and played with the babies. They were only a few months old, but Severus adored tickling them and playing peek-a-boo, reading and singing to them and carrying them about with him, basking in their untutored and unconditional adoration. When James arrived home, he noticed the glow of happiness that surrounded his mate, and smiled inquiringly. Severus flushed and smiled back warmly.

“Good evening papa,” Severus murmured huskily, and kissed James, guiding his husband’s hand to rest low on his soft but still flat belly. James kissed back enthusiastically, then lifted Severus and spun him with a whoop.

“What’s all this?” Remus asked, having followed James in. The lycanthrope had become a frequent guest in their house over the past months, and very much enjoyed spending time with the hodge-podge family.

“My love is giving me another baby,” James bragged, and then kissed Severus thoroughly. “Such a sweet little mother,” he husked, his hand dropping down to knead Severus’ buttocks possessively. Severus moaned, and James again swept the smaller wizard into his arms. This time though James carried Severus off, to laughter and teasing from the ladies. Remus stared after them bemusedly.

“Very rather loves being pregnant, and James quite enjoys getting him that way, plus they both want gads of children,” Lily explained fondly. Remus nodded slowly. While he had been aware that Severus had carried and birthed a child, he hadn’t really thought about that. In his mind, little Hadrian simply was. He adored the boy, who was his godson, but the thought of Severus and James being intimate hadn’t really breached his consciousness.

“You’re taking the two of them being together very well,” Lily said, looking up at Remus appraisingly. Remus sighed softly. He had been anticipating this conversation, or a variation thereof, since first being brought to Stormholme. His agile mind shifted and churned, trying to find the right words. It was clear that no one here would brook a single word against either Severus or James, not that Remus intended to insult either of them.

“I never had the same issues with Severus that the others did,” Remus said after a little thought on how to phrase things properly. “I think before his epiphany, James was mostly jealous. At the time we thought he was jealous of the attention you paid Severus, although looking back it rather seems it might have been the other way around. I - I tried to befriend Severus myself, although it ended badly,” he said with a grimace, remembering waking in the hospital wing and learning he had nearly savaged another student.

Lily nodded. In retrospect, it *was* rather difficult to tell who James had been more bothersome to, her or Severus. Like a little boy pulling on the pigtails of the girls he liked. James wasn’t an overtly malicious person, Lily knew that. But he also didn’t always understand when something stopped being funny and started being hurtful, and Sirius’ maliciousness towards anything in silver and green certainly hadn’t helped matters. James likely hadn’t really understood his own desires until that final year of school, when he had put aside antagonism and begun to court Severus with all the solicitousness of an Arthurian hero.

“Very’s such a sweet thing, now that he knows he’s loved, and doesn’t feel he has to protect himself at all moments,” Lily said fondly. “I did very poorly by him, but he’s like my brother, and thankfully very forgiving of slights against him. I think if you wished him a friend, he would grant his affection openly and without hesitation or restraint. All he’s ever wanted really, is to be loved and cared for, and he protects his friends viciously.”

Remus nodded thoughtfully, tucking that information away to be contemplated. He soon found Lily's supposition to be true. Severus had rather shy, reserved nature, but he was also utterly affection starved. Once Severus began to trust that Remus liked and cared for him, and wouldn't abandon him over some minor slight, wouldn't hurt or insult him, he became quite warm, if still quiet and reserved. Remus couldn't come to Stormholme without being fussed over by Severus, and James just stood aside and grinned, pleased as punch that his sweet mate and good friend were getting on so well.

"Mother Black wishes me to come to Grimsthorpe for Yule," Lily said one Saturday toward the middle of November as they sat comfortably before the hearth in one of the less formal parlours. Remus was over, as he often was, munching happily on a meat pie. Severus always pushed food on the lanky werewolf when he visited, insisting that it couldn't possibly be healthy for him to be so skinny. Remus had once tried to point out that Severus was even skinnier, but had roundly lost that argument when Severus pointed out he was also at least a head shorter than Remus.

"The wards will be strong there, it shouldn't be a danger, so long as the Lestranges and Malfoys don't come calling," Severus said dryly, sipping at his hot mulled cider. Like most Old Families, and yes, they insisted on capitalization, the Blacks had generations of blood bound wards surrounding their manor. The stationary spells would be anchored into a hearthstone carved with a runic array defining the ward scheme.

While impractical in some ways, such as making it impossible to use certain disguising enchantments such as the Unplottable charm or the *Fidelus* charm that had been developed after the setting of such ancient wards, those generations of stationary spells also allowed the ward holder to use his or her blood to directly interface with the wards and use them as an active defense. Such would be necessary to ward off Lucius Malfoy and the Lestrangle brothers, Rodolphus and Rabastan, who were some of the most notorious Death Eaters.

It pained Severus somewhat to think of Lucius as a servant of the enemy. As a firstie, Lucius had been Severus' protector, and Severus had thought of Lucius in a friendly way for years. Now though, he knew they would likely never again meet as friends, especially since Severus had refused Lucius' patronage.

"Could you bring someone with you?" James asked.

"I'd offer, but I'm not sure I'm up to travelling," Leonora said quietly. Her health was slowly failing despite Severus' best efforts. She was an old woman though, and had conceived James rather late in life. The birth had been difficult, and she had never wholly recovered. The combination of knowing she had a grandson to continue her line and the cold weather was making her more sickly than usual.

"I wouldn't mind, if they didn't," Remus offered tentatively. "I hear the Blacks have a marvelous library." Lily and Severus traded a look at that, and laughed delightedly.

"I'll see if she wouldn't mind," Lily said warmly. "I think you might like some of the other Blacks I've met. Lady Cassiopeia is very learned, and Lord Black is as well. Both are excellent conversationalists, as is Lord Pollux, although he can be rather gruff."

"You're enjoying it then, being the young Widow Black?" Severus teased gently. Lily smiled somewhat tremulously in response.

"Mother Black tells such tales of when her boys were young, and I can't help but love Regulus a little despite the untenable situation we were thrown into. I wish I had known him properly," Lily admitted.

“He was kind to me,” Severus said softly. “He was such a naive little idealist. It’s no wonder really, he got sucked in by the propaganda that was floating about the Slytherin dorms, especially well - he rather idolized Lucius. We all did in a way. He was our Prefect, and protected us all quite fiercely those first few years. Regulus more than most bought into the divisions that were fostered in that environment, since he was under such pressure to live up to Mother Black’s standards after, well - forgive me, but - after Sirius disappointed her so.”

“You’ve nothing to apologize for Very my love,” James said kindly but somewhat sadly. “I love Sirius as if he were my own brother, but he’s as subject to prejudice as he ever claimed his parents to be, simply in the opposite direction. Our cohort’s been so segmented and polarized, and he gets so caught into the *if you’re not with me, you’re against me* mindset.

“Dangers of a traditionalist upbringing I suppose. He’s always been that way, it’s just that before I tried to rein him in seventh year, I had always been with him, and once I started trying to get him to back off you in particular, he viewed me as against him. I’m not sure he’ll ever understand that I can still love and care for him as for a brother despite heartily disapproving of his treatment of you and no few others.”

Severus rose, gracefully crossing to James and kneeling next to his feet, taking James’ hands in his on James’ lap and kissing James’ scarred knuckles solicitously. James’ worn brown face softened slightly, and he reached out, gently cupping Severus’ face between his broad hands. Severus smiled up at James, turning into the caress and kissing James’ warm palm. James smiled in return, caressing the sharp angles of Severus’ golden brown face and stroking his silky black hair.

“Darling husband, you are far too good for this world,” Severus murmured affectionately, his dark eyes gleaming. “I praise all the gods and my Blessed ancestors every day that they were so kind as to give me to you. You have this my oath: If ever your chosen brother should wish to see you, and speak with you, I shall give no quarrel, and he shall be welcome in our home.”

“Beautiful man,” James murmured with equal fondness, and hauled Severus up onto his lap. He kissed Severus thoroughly, and Severus whimpered softly, clinging to his husband. “Come walk with me love,” James urged, and led Severus out of the room. The others smiled after them indulgently, watching as James slipped his arm around Severus’ waist, taking Severus’ delicate fingers in his other hand and kissing them softly. Severus blushed visibly, and then James was alternately kissing his ear and neck, and whispering sweet nothings in his ear.

“They’ll be a while,” Lily said drily, and the other ladies laughed delightedly. Remus stared after the two other wizards bemusedly.

“Lordess Severus runs even hotter than usual when he’s carrying,” Alina explained with a smirk. Remus flushed hotly, as he often did when reminded of the more carnal aspects of James and Severus’ marriage. As Lily had predicted, it was a few hours before James and Severus returned to the sitting room, and both were shifty-eyed and rumpled looking. The freshly tumbled look only made Severus more lovely in James’ rather biased opinion, and he spent the evening staring after his mate with no small amount of wonder.

“I sometimes still have trouble believing I managed to win him,” James confessed to Remus as they sat up that night after Severus and the Ladies had gone up to bed. “It’s mind boggling still, that this is the same Severus I teased for so many years, and yet he’s consented to be mine, always and forever mine, and bear my children.” Remus smiled slightly.

“I admit the two of you fit in ways I never would have imagined possible,” Remus said. “Although, I could never quite imagine you and Lily together either. I’m glad to see they’ve patched up. Severus is - he’s just so different, that’s what I can’t get used to. When I think of him at school, he

was all snarl and spite and malevolence, although I know we drove him to that.”

“Remember back though, to that very first day we met him on the Express,” James reminded with a slight, wistful smile curling the corners of his full mouth. “He was tiny, smaller than Lily and thin as a whip, with those big black eyes. And before Siri and I opened our mouths and buggered it all to Hades, he was shy and terribly awkward, but curious. If we’d held our tongues a bit, we might have been his friends from the start.”

Remus nodded, conceding the point. Severus had been awkward and socially inept, but protective of Lily and their friendship even then. If in those minutes of first impression, Severus had accepted the other boys as potential friends rather than bullies or adversaries, it was likely he would have granted them that same intractable loyalty that James had finally won and Remus was now benefitting from.

“I ran into Black the other day,” Remus said darkly, memories of that train ride leading to memories of their once brother in pranking. “Made some choice comments about half-breeds, half-bloods, and traitors.” James growled softly at that, his hazel eyes flashing.

“Comments like that are part of the reason we’ve stopped talking completely,” James said tightly. “It was a minor miracle and only with your much valued assistance I got him to leave Very alone as much as he did that last year at Hogwarts, but then once Very started training with us at the Aurory, it was like every foul thing he’d ever thought about Very came spilling out his mouth. Especially once I decided to do SaRACo. instead of FiRACo., and Severus was acknowledged Lordess Prince.”

“In a way though, you and Severus have together everything he’s ever wanted; a family that doesn’t seem to give a whit about blood purity while still having the power, privileges, and prestige of an old, pure, bloodline,” Remus said. “He looked rough when I saw him, and I know things are bad out there with Moldyshorts doing his thing, but he looked really bad, like he’d lost a fight with a troll.”

“He’s in trouble at work all the time,” James confided. “Even in a state of martial law, there are certain standards that the Aurory likes us to uphold; not beating someone senseless and dragging them in ‘because they look shifty,’ or because they were in Slytherin. He’s on write up at least once a month. It’s only a matter of time before the Aurory has to let him go, and once he’s not on the Ministry’s payroll, he’ll be a complete loose cannon. I worry he’ll come after Very and Hadrian, or after Lily and her Antares.”

“You don’t think he could get through the wards here, do you?” Remus asked somewhat anxiously. James paused thoughtfully.

“No,” James said after a moment. “Very was the best warder in our cohort, so good the instructors learned tricks from him - he’s just so intuitive with magic, that’s how he was able to make all those spells at Hogwarts, and he’s improved loads of potions too,” James proudly explained. “He’s improved the wards here, on top of the old family wards, which were quite impressive to start with, and we’ve had the goblins add wartime wards on top of that. There are even animagus wards specific to me, since I’m the only one in the house, at least until Very learns, although that won’t be until he has the baby.”

“Impressive,” Remus agreed after letting out a low whistle, and James smiled smugly. “Enough of that,” Remus chided with a smile of his own, tossing a decorative tapestry pillow at James’ head. “We all know how very proud you are of having landed Severus in your bed, no need to be a prat about it.” James laughed delightedly at that.

“Like I said, sometimes I just can’t believe it myself,” James said, shaking his head. “We should go on up though, I’ve work come morning, and not long before Yule; I need to get planning.” Remus nodded in agreement, it was rather late. James didn’t mention that he knew Severus was likely laying awake in their bed, and would just as likely be more than willing to spread his legs. Despite being married long enough to be through the typical ‘honeymoon phase,’ they still adored one another, and having sex with one another.

Entering the bedroom, James smiled softly. Severus *had* been sitting up, but it had evidently gotten too late. He half-reclined against the pillows in his plain silk night shirt, long hair neatly plaited back, a book still clutched in his lax hand. Gently, James set the book aside after marking the page, then lifted his mate and placed Severus beneath the covers before undressing and climbing in. Severus, who seemed to have a James oriented sixth sense, turned unerringly into his husband’s arms. James nuzzled and kissed at him a bit, then yawned deeply and curled around Severus, quickly falling asleep.

James woke to the soft, light caress of Severus’ fingers on his face. He blinked sleepily, then smiled as his eyes focused. Severus had given him a vision correcting potion for their anniversary just before Hadrian’s birth, worried that James’ glasses might be lost in a fight, and the disadvantage put James in danger. It was a thoroughly practical gift, and very much Severus in that way. But at the same time, James knew that same practicality spoke of Severus’ immeasurable care for him.

“Good morning my love, what have you planned?” James asked huskily, reaching up to touch Severus’ smooth golden brown cheek, then his soft pink mouth.

“Check up for the baby and me,” Severus murmured gently, and smiled softly as James’ hand slid south to gently caress Severus’ abdomen where the new baby grew imperceptibly inside him. “I have a lead on some books that might be helpful for my research, so I have to write a few letters there, and also send for some language books, because they’re in Japanese.” James felt his eyebrows shoot up at that, and then he smiled.

“Merlin I married a clever wizard,” James said, and leaned in to give his sweetheart a soft kiss to affirm his affection. As much as James proclaimed his love, he knew Severus still sometimes needed that love shown rather than said. “I have a regular day myself. If I’m not out on a case, I’ll try and be home for lunch to play with Harry a bit.” Severus smiled beatifically at that. James’ mid day visits were ostensibly to play with his son and heir, but they usually involved a round of thorough lovemaking as well, as Severus was constantly randy. He couldn’t even blame it on the pregnancy hormones this early on; he just loved being with James.

“Fancy a shag before you get up and shave?” Severus asked huskily, to prove the point. James just grinned lecherously and rolled them so he rested over Severus, Severus’ legs splayed wide in offering. They both moaned eagerly, and James hurriedly rubbed his finger against Severus’ anus. Gently James relaxed the furred muscle that guarded Severus’ entrance. “Please Jamie,” Severus husked, and then James was gently pushing into his husband’s body.

“That what you need sweetheart?” James murmured, rolling his hips as he sank in slowly to the hilt. Severus moaned wordlessly, arching his back and pushing into the penetration. “Fuck that feels good baby. You’re so hot for me, feel so good opening up for me like that. My sweet little wizard.” Severus moaned again, rubbing his tender, swollen nipples as he clenched around James.

“Please James,” Severus whimpered. “Need you.” James groaned again, but obligingly picked up his pace. Severus sometimes wanted slow, but it was clear that this morning he just needed his husband, and didn’t have the patience for a longer coupling. It was probably just as well, James

thought with the last of his upper reasoning as he thrust deeper. He needed to get to work before too long, after all.

“This what you need?” James panted more harshly. “You need my cock? My seed? That what you want baby? You want that little mother?”

“Yes, Blessed Fates, please Jamie,” Severus gasped, and then he was coming with a low keen. James groaned deeply, pounding through Severus’ clenching orgasm. It took about a half dozen thrusts, and then James was coming as well, flooding Severus with his magic and his life-giving seed. Severus moaned eagerly, orgasming again as James filled him. “Love you daddy,” Severus murmured coyly, and James groaned, leaning down to kiss Severus deeply.

“Love you too little momma,” James replied, then regretfully eased himself up off his mate. Severus quashed a small whimper of loss, and too soon they were off in their different directions. James was a little later home to lunch than he would have liked, but he had seen a few things in the shop windows on his patrol, and wanted to stop and do a bit of shopping on the way. He still had plenty of time to eat his meal, play with little Harry, and then make love to Severus before he had to return to the Aurory for the afternoon.

“You never asked me at lunch,” Severus pouted when James came home that evening. Leonora and Alina traded looks and smiled behind their hands. They were well used to the teasing between the young couple, but that didn’t make it any less amusing.

“I’m sorry baby, how was your morning?” James remedied instantly. “I was so glad to see you and baby that I didn’t think to ask how your checkups went.” Severus smiled somewhat smugly at that, dandling Hadrian on his knee.

“I’m about a month along, as suspected, all well there,” Severus said, patting his belly. “And Hadrian is now 69 cm long, and 9.4 kilos, the 95th and 98th percentiles respectively for his age, and the 90th percentile of weight to length. The mediwitch said if he grows as projected, he’ll be at least as tall as you, and much cleverer of course, since he’ll take after his mother there.” James chuckled softly and leaned in, kissing his baby son’s button nose, and then Severus’ rather larger nose.

“I dearly hope he does get your smarts my love,” James agreed. “All the Blessed ancestors know that thinking things through will never be my strong suit. Smartest thing I ever did was bond to you.” Severus flushed at the compliment, as he usually did. His confidence had increased exponentially since first dating, then bonding James, but he was still plagued by self-doubt at times. Having Remus and Lily around helped though, as they understood his insecurities, and were perfectly willing to talk him up a bit when he was feeling low.

“He’s hitting all his milestones; smiling, playing, reaching for things, responding to his name, babbling a bit, lifting and holding up his head,” Severus rattled off, then lifted the baby to blow a warm raspberry on his belly. Hadrian squealed with delight and giggled, and Severus smiled indulgently, murmuring love and protection against his baby’s soft brown skin.

“Next month he’s due a few of his muggle vaccinations and the remainder of the magical ones, I don’t want to risk anything even if we are planning to stay mostly in the magical world. They checked that his first round of magical vaccines that he got at three months had taken properly, and so he’s fully protected against all the usual illnesses, plus this round includes the potions for displacement sickness and so forth to make traveling and living in the magical world easier,” Severus went on.

Severus hadn’t realized how at risk he himself had been until he was taken in by Lord Prince. Prior



to that, he had only had the most basic magical inoculations, the potions his mother had been capable of brewing at home, and able to get the ingredients for. As such, he had been unprotected against some of the rarer but more deadly illnesses, and had suffered greatly from displacement sickness when using magical transportation. He had learned to floo all over again after having the potions, and could now thankfully exit a hearth as gracefully as any well trained pureblood.

“How soon can they tell if it’s a boy or a girl?” Lily asked where she sat with Antares. The mediwitch had checked them over as well, to make sure that Lily was recovering properly from the birth. Like Hadrian, Antares was hitting all his milestones, and Lily and Severus were quite pleased to bring the two boys up together. While it wasn’t suggested that they travel before the babies were seven months, the Healer had agreed that they could start flooing and apparating a bit with the babies, so long as they were well secured, and had their heads covered in the floo.

“It isn’t a boy or a girl yet,” Severus teased. “Just a little tadpole.” Lily giggled, then rolled her eyes and made a ‘carry on’ motion to indicate the question still stood.

“A witch’s baby, they can differentiate the sexes at around 18 to 20 weeks,” Severus answered. “Wizards’ babies, it’s a little more variable since there’s a greater influence from the father’s magic on development. I’m less than a month in, I conceived probably the fifth? So I haven’t even got morning sickness yet. Last time, they started trying to see if Harry was a boy or a girl at about - 12 weeks I think? They base it on how big the fetus is. Once the fetus is about 14 cm from the crown to the ‘tail’ they start trying to sex it. Any smaller, the only differences are internal, and too small to be useful in differentiation.”

“And no one will be able to tell until puberty or even full inheritance if it’s a third-sexed boy like Severus,” James said, rubbing his husband’s shoulder. Severus blushed slightly; he had been surprised to learn there was an official third sex for fertile males, and all his paperwork had been changed appropriately upon his being recognized by and Invested in House Prince. It made it seem more ‘normal’ though, that he could conceive and carry a child without potions or spells if he wasn’t really a ‘man’ the way James was.

“I hope at least one will be,” Severus admitted. “It’s a valuable bloodline trait.” James smiled gently.

“I just want a boy as clever as his momma,” James said, and Severus flushed beautifully. They talked happily until it was bedtime for the babies, at which point Severus retired too. He tired easily in early pregnancy, and figured he might as well get as much rest as he could between the pregnancy and his five month old son. It wasn’t really optimal to be pregnant again so soon, between Hadrian’s age and the war on. But Severus wanted his big family, and he didn’t want to wait.

## Chapter End Notes

The growth charts I used for Harry are from the CDC and may be slightly anachronistic (length and weight by age: [http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/data/who/grchrt\\_boys\\_24lw\\_100611.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/data/who/grchrt_boys_24lw_100611.pdf); length by weight: [http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/data/who/grchrt\\_boys\\_24hdcirc-14w\\_rev90910.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts/data/who/grchrt_boys_24hdcirc-14w_rev90910.pdf)), and this pregnancy week by week from webmd when discussing determination / assignment of sex: <http://www.webmd.com/baby/interactive-pregnancy-tool-fetal-development#week-18>



# In Defense of Love

## Chapter Notes

The Malfoys show up briefly, and the return of Sirius! Sirius doesn't behave very well, but I promise he'll get better.

Yule soon arrived, and the invitation to Grimsthorpe was expanded to include all the Princes and Potters, plus Remus. They discussed it a bit, but Walburga all but promised that the Malfoys and the Lestranges wouldn't be there, and Sirius was unlikely to show up, so they deemed it safe enough. Severus, having met some of the Lestranges at crossed wands, remained somewhat nervous, but couldn't argue that the security at Grimsthorpe was formidable when they arrived.

The Black's country home was larger than the Princes', and had been renovated more recently. The two families were of similar age, although since there had always been more Blacks, they had always been slightly more powerful through strength of numbers. It was a nice enough holiday though, and as at Stormholme, celebrated in the traditional British manner with a nightlong vigil, and then an awakening of fire with the dawn.

On the morning of Old Twelfth Night in early January, Severus went down to breakfast at Grimsthorpe more cautiously than usual, hearing raised voices bouncing along the hard surfaces of marble flooring and stone walls, echoing up the vast atrium. Stepping into the morning room, he was quite glad he'd checked on Hadrian but left him to sleep in his bassinet under a monitoring charm, as he found James and Sirius in one another's faces. Thankfully neither of them had yet drawn his wand. Severus debated a moment, worrying his lower lip, then crossed quietly to James and took his arm, gently restraining him. James could have easily shaken free of the loose hold, but instead quieted and stilled, although Severus could feel the tension in James' lithely muscled form.

"Peace my love," Severus urged quietly. "We are here in guest-friendship," he reminded, then shot a wary look at Sirius. "Lord Sirius won't breach his family's word, unless he wishes to do them further dishonour." Sirius coloured unattractively, stormy eyes narrowing.

"*Snivellus*," Sirius sneered, and even at the distance of a few paces, Severus could smell the stale alcohol on Black's breath. Severus grimaced at the foul scent, memories of his muggle sperm donor rising unbidden. He drew back as James lashed out without hesitation, jerking his arm from Severus' grasp and popping Sirius in the nose. It wasn't a full powered hit, but it was certainly hard enough to set Sirius bleeding and his temper rising.

"You do *not* call him that," James growled as Severus firmly grabbed his arm and dragged him back a step. The wards settled heavily over them, and moment later, old Lord Black came in at a hurried limp.

"Forgive my husband Lord Black," Severus said, dropping a pretty obedience. "It displeases him when I am the subject of Lord Sirius' amusement." Lord Black narrowed his eyes and drew his wand, flicking it sharply, then nodding.

"Young Sirius," Lord Black rasped. "You are here on probation. Do not make me regret spending the effort to placate Walburga." Sirius huffed, and stalked from the room without a word, his hand clasped over his bloodied nose.

“My apologies as well Lord Black,” James said with a slightly roguish smile. “My temper does tend to get the better of me when people misspeak regarding my beloved.” He shot Severus a soft look, and Severus flushed heatedly, making Lord Black chuckle softly.

“It is a good thing, to defend one’s mate so,” Lord Black declared, and then sat. Tea popped up on the table, and before too long, the rest of the family had come down to eat. Sirius remained absent, and Severus couldn’t help but hope he had gone away again. Severus was disappointed two days later, as they were preparing to return to Stormholme. Lily and Antares would be staying on at Grimsthorpe, but as neither of the babies had any ill effects from the floo journey, much visiting was anticipated between the houses.

“Jamie,” Severus warned as he noted his husband tensing for a fight. Sirius let out a bark of supremely unamused laughter.

“What, has he got you completely neutered *Lord Potter*,” Sirius sneered, the last coming out almost as a curse. “You sure your little pet there’s the one carried the baby?” James’ wand was out in an instant, his hand trembling with the intensity of his anger.

“Please Jamie,” Severus practically begged. “It’s not worth it, please.”

“Listen to the little wife, know’s he’s not worth the dirt you scrape off your shoe,” Sirius needled, and James could take no more. He cast silently, and Sirius was knocked back. Sirius was never one to take an insult, or a hex, without retaliation though. He returned fire almost instantly, and Severus knew even before he saw the putrid color of the spell that it wasn’t going to be anything as innocuous as the knockback jinx James had used. In an instant, Severus was between the two combatants, his wandless shield flaring Healer green as he took Sirius’ hex to the back.

“You’re twice blessed I always use a green staff shield,” Severus snarled, turning. He still held a visible shield over the baby carrier on his chest. “What sort of moron fires at a pregnant wizard and child. Maybe you agree with your cousins though, that a half-blood’s children are only so much vermin to be exterminated?” Sirius blanched and stepped back in the face of Severus’ flashing-eyed anger and accusation. Severus took the space provided, stepping close to hiss directly in Sirius’ face. “Grow up. You never knew me to start with, and you’ve no right to judge Jamie for acting like a grown ass man and getting over his petty childhood rivalries.”

“He’s right Siri. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again. I love you like a brother, but right now I don’t like you very much. I’ll do my best in future to make sure our paths don’t cross again,” James said, tugging Severus back away from Sirius. His jaw was tight with anger, and he gathered Severus close, walking him carefully through the floo. Back at Stormholme, James led them to the niche in the entry where the old household gods of Severus’ ancestors were kept, Vesta and Fortuna and the three Norns, Ganesha and Buddha and Ba’al and Alina’s faience Isis cult figurine.

“Bless,” Severus murmured, and kissed James’ stubbled cheek, then knelt and made his devotions, and gave thanks for being returned safely to his homeplace. Despite that they were not the gods of his own family, James made devotions as well. If Severus had used almost any shield but the Healer’s green staff, he could have been badly hurt, as could their unborn child.

“The last thing we needed was animosity in what was supposed to be a safe place,” James sighed, but Severus hushed him gently.

“They’re an antagonistic clan by nature, you know that,” Severus reminded. “He’ll have to grow up eventually Jamie, and maybe, when he does, in a hundred years or so, you can be friends again.” James smiled wanly, and kissed Severus.

“Sounds like about the right timeframe,” James admitted sadly. “Let’s go lay down Hadrian. I want to call the Healer and have you checked, just in case.” Severus rolled his eyes, but nodded indulgently. “Where’s Remus?” he realized, and Severus rolled his eyes again.

“Staying on with Lily for a bit, remember?” Severus reminded. “I think he might like her,” he said thoughtfully. “Unfortunately, the husband’s brothers and cousins have first dibs on a widow.”

“Wait, so Sirius could end up with Lily and Antares?” James asked, eyes wide. Severus nodded. “Merlin, I hope he doesn’t think of that,” he said quietly. “He’d do it just to be spiteful, and mistreat them, I just know it.” Severus shivered at that, remembering his father hulking over him, and the livid expression on Sirius’ face when he had tried to curse James.

“We need to make sure he never realizes, or that the other Blacks won’t stand for it,” Severus said firmly, and James nodded. “I could adopt Lily as my sister?” he suggested after a moment. “I’ve been thinking on it for a while, and it would give her a bit of magical pedigree, which would make her more politically powerful in her own right.

“I don’t think she’s ever had a heritage parchment done either, and I have a theory that most muggle-borns are actually the children of squibs who’ve been cast out of the magical world. She’s talented and well connected already; if we could find a connection to a family that was Old but didn’t support You-Know-Who, they could Induct her as well. I worry about Dumbledore’s interest in the children, and while we and the Blacks would do our best for Antares....”

“Say Moldyshorts,” James reminded, cutting into Severus’ rambling speculation. They didn’t dare use the actual name, at least one Old Family had already been slaughtered in their manor, despite the presence of generations of wards, ggy because of the Taboo. James had been using the mocking name for some time already, and gotten Remus at least to use it regularly as well. Severus snorted softly.

“Moldyshorts,” Severus said, smiling slightly, then leaned up to kiss James’ cheek again. “I’ll write Lily about the adoption and heritage parchment. Lord Black can do that easily, or have it done, at least.” James smiled at that, and sent his husband off with a pat on the rear. Severus shot him an utterly adorable glare at that, and James’ smile widened into a broad grin. Severus strode off in a huff, and James, very appreciatively, watched him walk away.

“Man I lucked out,” James said to himself with a grin, then sauntered off himself. He knew there was a pile of Wizengamot business he needed to look over before the Yule recess ended and the next legislative term began. The parliamentary body was increasingly polarized as the war intensified, the traditionalists and modernists almost coming to blows even in the August Chamber.

Since reconnecting with Remus, the lycanthrope had been named the proxy for both the Potter and Prince seats, but he would only vote the opinions of the respective Lords of those Houses, rather than his own interests. In that respect, Remus was the ideal proxy, although it required James to do more homework than he really enjoyed. James kept up fairly well though, and he and Severus and the Ladies discussed the bills and acts at length before staking their positions.

A few days later it was Severus’ birthday. James had bought him a new book, a rare German history of lycanthropy, purportedly written by a werewolf. He had gotten a few less academic gifts for Severus as well, including a new pair of gloves, and a fox fur lined hood. Severus, who due to his leanness was often chilled, smiled warmly at that, and James returned the expression with delight.

“You deserve a special thank you,” Severus murmured when James came up to bed that night. James leered in anticipation, and Severus swatted him gently, then knelt gracefully and nuzzled

against James' prick. From the start of their relationship, Severus had loved having James' cock in his mouth, and James was quite appreciative of that. James groaned softly, reaching down to stroke his fingers through Severus' glossy black hair. Severus rubbed his face against James' crotch a second time, then undid the fastening of James' trousers and pulled him out.

"Oh yeah," James agreed breathlessly, sitting and shucking his trousers entirely so he could splay his legs wide. Severus smirked, then leaned in so when his spoke, his words ghosted warm and moist over James' erection.

"Thank you for the lovely presents," Severus husked, and then he swallowed James whole. James groaned deeply, glad he was already seated on the edge of the bed. His knees would have given out otherwise. Severus gave head beautifully, licking and suckling and driving James wild with his lips and his hands and his agile tongue. James didn't last long, couldn't, not with Severus looking up at him with those big dark eyes.

"Merlin you're good at that," James gasped breathlessly when he could once more string together a coherent thought, laying back with his arm tossed over his face. Severus chuckled softly and crawled up to lay sprawled on top of James. "Anything else you want for your birthday?" he asked, kneading one of Severus' firm little buttocks. Severus let out a low moan, and James deftly eased two fingers into him. It didn't take long to finger Severus to orgasm, and then they drifted off to sleep twined together.

James' holidays were over the following morning, and so as usual, he kissed Severus and Hadrian goodbye, and went off to work after a quick prayer to the household gods and Blessed ancestors. While he hadn't been raised religious, the war made everyone more aware of their traditions and their families, including those Blessed ancestors already passed through the veil. His mother, who had been only slightly religious as a younger woman, had become much more so over the past few years since the attack on Hartsfield. Even Severus, although not terribly religious aside from celebrating the high holy days and taking the gods' names in vain, had insisted on Hadrian having a proper naming ceremony in the Prince's Roman pantheism oriented tradition. Leonora had overseen a naming in the hodgepodge Celtic - Norse religion followed by many British traditionalists.

January was quiet, but the beginning of February brought the slaughter of Auror Edgar Bones and his family in their ancestral manor. A previously trusted friend - no one could say whom - had managed to lower the wards from the inside, and *imperius* was whispered fearfully in speculation. Only their baby girl, a few months older than Hadrian, survived, secreted away by the loyal House Elves. Almost immediately Auror Amelia Bones, Edgar's sister, broke off her engagement with Auror Rufus Scrimgeour and threw herself almost rabidly into the fight. Scrimgeour, who had also long been friends with Edgar, also grew more intensely devoted to opposition to the Dark Lord.

James too was deeply shaken; the Boneses, Potters, and Longbottoms had an age old alliance, and now two of the three families had been attacked in their ancestral homes. Moreover, while James and Edgar hadn't been particularly close, Edgar being a few years older, they had bonded at work over the recent births of their first children. Severus and James went over their wards carefully in response, ensuring that only they themselves could add someone new to the overall ward scheme. The Ministry responded to the murders by authorizing Aurors to use the Unforgivables. Despite his anger at the loss of his friend and colleague, the authorization of deadly force had James stalking the halls in a towering temper, growling about how using the tools of the enemy would make them just as bad.

"I don't care if it stains your hands," Severus finally bit out, his tone tight and sharp. "I just want you to come home to me each night. If it takes using the killing curse to do that, I'm all for it."

James had deflated at that, and their lovemaking had been desperately tender that night. "I can't lose you Jamie," Severus breathed, and James nodded silently.

"I killed a man today," James said when he got home a week later, his entire body tense. Severus paused, then quickly called an elf to take Hadrian and went to James. He kissed James' neck, then raised James' broad, strong hands and kissed his palms. "It happened so fast," James whispered. "It was Rowle, the one who was four years above us - I didn't use the killing curse, but he's still dead."

"Lawson," Severus said. "He was a Death Eater, I remember Thorfinn bragging about it," he said, naming another former housemate, only two years their senior. "He would have killed you without remorse Jamie. You did what you had to, to come home to your husband and your son, to be there for the baby I'm carrying." James nodded tightly, but Severus could see he was still tense, still uncomfortable. "You've killed before," Severus pointed out, trying to suss out the problem.

"That was in your defense, in defense of our home," James argued somewhat sullenly, the muscle of his jaw clenched tight, his voice strained.

"This was too," Severus replied evenly, continuing to massage James' palms and fingers, keeping James from clenching his hands into fists with tension. "Maybe it wasn't as direct a threat, but don't imagine that Moldysorts has forgotten about us. He wants something from us, and if he doesn't get it, he'll kill us as easily as swatting a fly."

"I know that but - I became an Auror because I wanted to protect people, not to hurt - to kill people. Not even Death Eaters," James said quietly, pulling Severus into a tight embrace and nuzzling against his hair.

"You are," Severus promised, looking up. He kissed James softly on the chin, and James angled down almost unconsciously, earning himself an even softer kiss on the mouth. "You're protecting us all Jamie. You're doing so much good. And you wouldn't be the righteous man you are if you weren't bothered by killing. But you're doing the right thing." James took Severus' mouth in a deeper, needier kiss. "Come up to bed darling," Severus urged, and soon he had James naked in their bed, flat on his back. "I love you, forever, no matter what," Severus promised.

Leaning down, Severus thoroughly kissed James' full mouth, then down, along his firm jaw and down his arching throat, over his collarbones and shoulders. James moaned softly as one of his dark nipples was laved, the other pinched into a peak. Severus kissed and touched his husband all over, then sucked him for a while and tongue-bathed his testicles before kneeling up. Severus smiled seductively, and then he shifted back and down, taking James' length into himself. James groaned deeply, his hips rolling up eagerly. Severus smiled more softly, gathering his legs under himself and clenching around James as he rose up slightly.

"Oh, Very," James gasped, stroking and kneading Severus' thighs. Severus' eyes were soon hooded with arousal as he slowly rode James. Before long, the pleasure was too much. James pulled Severus down against his chest and rolled, rising to his knees and lifting Severus' hips with him. He thrust deep, savoring Severus' eager sounds of pleasure. It only took a little longer from there, James taking Severus thoroughly. "Love you so much Very," James gasped when he had finished and collapsed bonelessly next to his husband.

"And I you, my Lord husband," Severus murmured softly, and they kissed tenderly before falling asleep.

"Lily wants me to come to Grimsthorpe tomorrow, and bring Hadrian," Severus told James a few weeks after James' first on-duty kill. It had been ruled a righteous killing as soon as the Dark Mark

was found on Rowle's muscular forearm, but James had remained slightly uneasy about using deadly force. Severus couldn't help but worry; that moment of hesitation might one day be the difference between life and death.

"That's fine," James said. "Their wards are almost as good as here." Severus smiled slightly at the indirect compliment on their home wards, which he scrupulously maintained. "Frank's been asking about us bringing Hadrian to Amounderness to meet Neville as well, now that they're old enough for flooring."

"That would be nice. And his father and Mother Potter are cousins, aren't they?" Severus asked.

"They are, and I think it would do mother good to go visiting a bit. I'll go by myself first to check the wards," James promised. "I know Frank won't mind that." Severus nodded.

"I have no objections," Severus said with a smile. He knew how important James' friends were to him, and the Longbottoms were also an old familial alliance. In the morning, Severus got Hadrian ready and flooded to Grimsthorpe. He found the house in chaos. Thankfully Cassiopeia was the first to see him. She grabbed his arm and dragged Severus and Hadrian from the receiving room. Soon she had him stashed away in a bedroom with Lily, Antares and Remus.

"The Malfoys are here," Cassiopeia said quietly. "All the bedrooms have silencing and anti-eavesdropping wards up as standard." Severus nodded with a shiver.

"Sorry Very," Lily apologized.

"Not your fault Red, you couldn't know they were planning to visit," Severus chided.

"*We* didn't know they were planning to visit," Cassiopeia said, her displeasure clear in her tone. "Izzy ought to know better. I imagine young Lord Lucius is nosing about, trying to threaten the old man." Severus snorted softly at that, because that actually sounded about right, and also because he couldn't imagine anyone intimidating old Arcturus, Lord Black. The man was utterly unflappable, and would likely live to two hundred out of sheer spite.

"That was my reaction too," Lily said with a nervous laugh, then cooed at Antares, who was fussing. The babies could feel the tension in the air, and didn't much like it. There wasn't anything they could do though, save wait.

"Shite," Cassiopeia swore a few hours into the tense waiting, her storm-grey eyes distant.

"What?" Severus asked nervously, bouncing Hadrian a bit to keep him from fussing too much.

"Something's up with the wards. They're up, but - I don't know," Cassiopeia said hesitantly.

"Lily, take Harry," Severus said decisively.

"Very," Lily hesitated, and he shook his head.

"I'm trained with wards, and Antares only has one parent. You need to be a noncombatant, and you need to protect the babies, and if anything happens to me, you need to keep Jamie from doing anything stupid," Severus said firmly, despite that his voice was trembling. "Moreover, you never learned the green staff shield since you weren't a battlefield Healer. It'll stop almost anything short of an Unforgivable."

"Just be careful Very," Lily said. "Hadrian needs his mother, too."



"I will be. But Lucius wasn't always a danger to me. Even if he has a clear shot, I'm pretty sure he'll hesitate. I can use that," Severus said. Lily nodded, her face grim, and then Cassiopeia and Severus were slipping from the room.

"The wards anchor to a hearthstone in the cellars, but I think we need to find the old man first," Cassiopeia said softly. Severus nodded, and they moved quickly and quietly through the house. The two of them soon slipped into the Lord Black's office, and hesitated there. Lord Black glanced over, nodding slightly and motioning them forward. Lucius - it could only be Lucius, with that white blond hair - stood instantly, wand out as he turned. Severus stepped forward in the same instant, wordlessly and wandlessly throwing up the signature green shield of the Healers.

"Merlin, don't sneak up on me like that!" Lucius exclaimed, and then to Severus' surprise, he was being embraced by the older wizard.

"Luc?" Severus asked hesitantly.

"Sorry Severus," Lucius returned, flushing slightly as he withdrew, and glancing back to Lord Black.

"We'll need your husband young Lordess Prince," Lord Black rasped. "Lord Lucius would keep his son from the slavery he has been bound into." Severus' dark eyes widened, and he looked back to Lucius.

"I know I've made mistakes," Lucius said softly. "But I didn't join this movement to become a killer." Severus hesitated a moment, judging Lucius' sincerity, then nodded, deciding the trust his instinct that the blond meant no harm. Severus conjured his *patronus* silently, smiling slightly as the glowing silver hind appeared from the evanescent mist and nuzzled against him, enfolding him in the warmth of his love for James given magical form.

"James, come to Grimsthorpe for lunch today, there's someone here you need to meet. *Audemus*," Severus said, the last their keyword to let each other know they were safe, and not under any type of coercion or compulsion. He looked over Lucius carefully then, seeing the glimmer of a glamourie over his face, seeing the tense, tired way he held himself. Looking past him, Severus also looked over Narcissa with a Healer's eye. She was strained as well, although her glamourie portrayed the perfect pureblood Lady.

"Glamourie down, I can't Heal what I can't see," Severus said decisively, gently pushing Lucius down into a chair. Lucius looked at him appraisingly for a long moment, and then, with a shimmer of light, his glamourie fell. His always milk-pale skin was dull and nearly grey, his cheeks gaunt. His pale grey eyes had lost their quicksilver gleam, and were haunted with shadows. Deep bruises beneath his eyes told of sleepless nights, and the once lustrous platinum hair had become dull and brittle. "Oh Luc," Severus sighed, and gently began to diagnose and heal.

When he had done all he could for Lucius, Severus gently pushed past him to sit at Narcissa's side and look at her expectantly. She gave a tight little smile, then dropped her glamourie as well. Her pale golden curls, inherited from her Rosier mother, were limp and dull despite being exquisitely dressed, her usually ivory complexion wan and waxy. Like Lucius, she looked like she had slept and eaten far too infrequently in the past while. The baby, at least, was in fine health when Severus scanned both mother and child.

"The change in the wards then?" Cassiopeia asked.

"Adding Lucius and Draco to the floo wards," Lord Black responded. Cassiopeia nodded, watching Severus work. It was a small exception, and would allow the Malfoys entry while still protecting

the heart of House Black. Severus had just finished writing up prescriptions for both adult Malfoys when James entered the room, still in uniform red Auror robes with epaulets at his shoulders designating his rank of constable and displaying his badge number.

James immediately tensed, flicking his scarred brown hand so his wand dropped into his fingers from the forearm sheath. Severus straightened and smiled tiredly, going to James and gently placing his fingers on James' wand hand in silent restraint. Hard hazel eyes slowly found Severus', and Severus reassured his husband without words.

"I've found you an informant," Lord Black wheezed with a craggy smile. James let out a snort of amusement, turning his eyes back on Lucius. With the keen eye of an investigator, he took in the same things Severus had noted; that Malfoy's always pale skin was practically cadaverous, that his hair was ill kept, that his sharp featured face had become almost skull-like.

"You'll make an oath Malfoy, that you and yours are no threat, no danger to me and mine," James demanded.

"I'd as soon hurt my own son as Severus," Lucius said, bristling visibly. "He's like my little brother." Severus flushed at that, looking imploringly at James. Severus had known Lucius was inexplicably fond of him, and he was still fond of Lucius as well, although he would never have claimed an affection so strong as brotherhood.

"Your oath," James demanded through grit teeth. Lucius sighed, but nodded. He stood and extended his wand to James, hilt first.

"I, Lucius Abraxas Gallo Gwenael Malfoy, first of that Name, Scion to the Noble House Malfoy of Armorica and the Liberty of Savernake, so swear, that by my word, by my wand, by my hand, I shall never willingly do harm to James Cyneric Ignottus Potter, first of that name, Lord of the Ancient and Most Noble House Potter of Hartsfield Hundred, nor to his husband, Severus Tiburon Melanthios Prince, first of that name, Lord of the Ancient and Most Noble House Prince of Hrafnswath, nor any of their offspring. This I so swear, by my name and my magic, and so shall it be," Lucius said, his voice low and infused with power.

"So witnessed, so sworn, and so shall it be," Lord Black said firmly, and the magic of the oath swirled around them.

"So shall it be," James echoed, and offered Lucius his hand. They shook stiffly, and Severus hugged James loosely about the waist.

"We should let the others know it's safe to come out," Severus murmured sleepily, worn by the tension and his high level magic usage and his pregnancy. James nodded, and conjured his *patronus*. Having seen Severus' silver hind, the Malfoys smirked slightly at the sight of James' glowing hart, and then it bounded off to deliver the message. Soon, Lily and Remus slipped into the room, each of them carrying a baby.

Severus detached himself from James and went instantly to Remus, sweeping up his son and nuzzling possessively against Hadrian's soft brown skin. James smiled indulgently, and a moment later Severus was back at his side. They kissed softly, reassuring one another, then kissed their son. From the sofa, Lucius watched, pleased to see Severus so happy, and so safe. He had caught glimpses at school, of the sweet, innocent boy Severus was beneath his armour, and was grateful James could provide the little Slytherin with the security he needed to be publicly display that softness and openness.

"Come here little brother," Lucius requested gently, standing. "Let me see your son." Severus

ducked his head slightly, but proudly brought Hadrian over. "It pleases me more than you can imagine, to see you happy and well cared for darling," Lucius murmured, tipping Severus' face up so their eyes met and held. Lucius leaned down, kissing Hadrian and then Severus on their foreheads. "You're a lucky man, James Potter."

"I know it," James said seriously, his eyes resting warmly on Severus. Severus was about three months along by then, and just beginning to show. James' eyes traced the slight swell of his mate's belly possessively. His jaw softened, and he smiled as Severus caught his eye and flushed beautifully. "A very lucky man." Severus' flush deepened as James crossed the room and looped an arm around his waist. "Who unfortunately has to go back to work." He kissed Severus' temple, then gave Lucius a measuring look.

"I'll look after him," Lucius promised. James nodded, and then he was gone.

"I *can* take care of myself," James heard Severus huff as he left the room, and smiled. He carried his good mood through the afternoon, despite the less than charitable utterances of Sirius and the horror of Auror work in a state under martial law. Thankfully though, he came home safe once again. He gave thanks to the *lares* in the niche, then found Severus and pulled him up for a thorough kiss.

"That bad?" Severus asked quietly, his hand cupping James' cheek. He'd become accustomed to these wordless cues, and using them to decipher just how awful James' day had been.

"There's slow word coming in about a werewolf attack in rural north Wales last full moon. They say it was Greyback, five, maybe ten houses broken into, the parents killed and children mauled," James said softly. "But none of the children have been found alive, and it's been over a week, so the clues are all muddled." Severus grimaced at that. He knew well that the longer a scene sat, the more difficult it was to decode. He had been better at it than most, his logical mind seeing the scenes like a puzzle, but he knew his gift was rare indeed.

"Can you bring the files home? Technically, I'm still attached to SaRACo., just on maternity leave," Severus reminded. While he was no longer part of the Forward Triage Unit, the Auror Corps had refused to take his resignation, instead granting him extended family leave. He even collected half pay. James grinned, and kissed Severus again.

"I can, and I will, thanks baby. Now let me go kiss Hadrian and say hello to mother before I eat," James said warmly.

"Auntie is in with Mother Potter," Severus said. "I - I've looked over Mother Potter - James," he said hesitantly.

"I know," James said quietly, his face crumpling in distress. "I - I don't want her to linger, and suffer, but I can't bear to let her go, either."

"Please, soon," Severus said gently. "She speaks to your father, and her own parents, often. She's more in their world than ours anymore." James nodded tightly, understanding that it was time to let his mother go, but not able to truly accept it yet. He went and kissed his sleeping son, and looked in on his mother. She was sleeping as well, Alina sitting at the bedside and knitting. James nodded, his heart aching, and returned to the sitting room they used most often. As expected, he found Severus waiting for him with a supper tray.

"Distract me?" James suggested. Severus smiled wanly, knowing that James was already mourning his mother, despite that she yet lived.

“Part of the reason Lily had wanted me to come over is Lord Black had her heritage parchment done. She has Bones and Prewett blood, a few generations back. I don’t know the Prewetts at all, save that the twins were killed in Dumbledore’s Order, but I know that the Bones’ are old allies of the Potters,” Severus said. “She’s agreed, after a bit of persuasion from both myself and Lord Black, to be adopted as a daughter of House Prince. I can adopt Antares as my nephew at the same time.”

“That - that’s good,” James said, blinking at the unexpected news. He knew that Severus and Lily had a pet theory that muggleborns were the descendants of squibs, and that they’d found some research to back it up. He hadn’t expected them to find evidence of the theory in Lily’s own family tree though.

“Alice called Grimsthorpe after Lily while I was there, and invited us both to bring the boys to Amounderness next week to meet Neville. It seemed like a nice mothers and children thing,” Severus went on. “I can go ahead of time to check the wards if you don’t have time. I know you’re terribly busy.”

“I’d appreciate it baby,” James said. “You’ve always been better than me at wards anyways.” Severus smiled sweetly at the compliment, as James had intended. “How are you doing? And when’s your next checkup?”

“I’m well, no morning sickness so far,” Severus said with a soft smile, his hand falling to his belly. He was just a tiny bit swollen around the middle, the vaguest hint of his pregnancy visible in his form to those who knew him well. “The pediatric Healer will come again in a month for Hadrian, and Healer Rancic will be by around then to check on me and baby,” Severus said. “I’m about three months along now, so we should know the sex soon, if this one is more cooperative than Hadrian was.”

James grinned at that, and leaned down to kiss Severus’ belly. If this went anything like Severus’ pregnancy with Hadrian, the next four months would be increasingly taxing on Severus’ body. The baby would drain Severus’ magic, and on top of that, a portion of Severus’ magic was also helping sustain the pseudo-mammaries which nurtured Hadrian. It was with such thoughts of Severus and their children that James went to bed some time later, curling contentedly around his spouse.

“I’ll call Alice today about checking the wards at Amounderness,” Severus said the next morning at breakfast, after James had kissed him in greeting. “Lily wants to do the adoption at the next propitious date, once she figures out when *that* is, and Lord Black has already contacted Lords Bones and Prewett for her. There’s already a connection by marriage between the Blacks and Prewetts as I understand it. Although, the Blacks are a big enough family that they have quite a few alliance marriages on both sides of the war.”

“I just wish Lord Black was a bit stronger, not quite so old, and could call those alliances to bear, make more of a middle for the rest of us to stand in,” James said softly. “Maybe it’s like mother said, and we all become more traditional as we age, but I sure as hell don’t agree with everything Dumbledore is doing. He barely said a word against the last anti-werewolf legislation, despite that in private he’s always on about second chances and ensuring that the disadvantaged are protected. He hasn’t been terribly helpful to the muggle-born either.” Severus nodded in agreement. He didn’t keep up with the Wizengamot quite as much as James, but he had noticed Dumbledore’s hypocrisy as well.

“Has he still been asking after Hadrian?” Severus inquired softly. “It worries me, his interest in our son.”

“He has, tried to corner me after the last Order meeting,” James said with a tired sigh. “He’s still

being very vague about his reasons though, and I'm not letting him have access to you, our son, or our home without giving me a damn good reason." Severus smiled, leaning up to kiss James softly.

"Don't worry about what can't be changed Jamie. Get dressed and go save the day," Severus urged gently, and James smiled, then did as he was bid.

Three weeks later, Severus and Lily stood skyclad at the center of the standing stones near Stormholme. Lord Black and Ladies Alina and Cassiopeia stood with them, while Severus ritually adopted Lily as his sister and Antares as his nephew. It had taken quite a bit of arithmancy to rework the standard blood adoption rituals to add a sister and nephew without parents present, especially as when they did Severus' Heritage Chart to get the arithmancy correct, it showed that even before his adoption by the last Lord Prince, he had already been a Prince by the paternal line, but not the maternal line.

Severus' mother Eileen had been the illegitimate daughter of the late Regulus Black the first, not the legitimate daughter of Aeolus Prince, and Severus' father had not been Tobias Snape, but the Cenante Prince to whom Eileen had been betrothed. Given the timing, it was likely that Eileen had been forced into anticipating her bonding bed, and had then fled Stormholme before she even knew she was with child. Severus was glad nonetheless that his own adoption had made him a son of the third line, rather than his original bloodline. Either way he would have been a Prince, but with the adoption, the blood of his mother's rapist no longer flowed in his veins.

Neither Severus nor the Blacks had expected the revelation though, and so in addition to Severus adopting Lily as a Prince, he was also Invested as a Black of the blood. While Severus wouldn't inherit much from the Blacks, bearing the Black blood was beneficial in terms of alliances, and it also gave him access to certain otherwise restricted parts of Grimsthorpe, including the Black's rarest books. In theory, it also would protect him from other members of the family, a boon with Bellatrix running about like a madwoman, cursing everyone in sight.

As they recovered at Grimsthorpe in the aftermath, they talked desultorily of this and that. Like James, Lily was of the opinion that the Blacks ought to take on a more vocally oppositional role to Voldemort, and cast out Bellatrix Lestrange. The family was already torn though. Walburga's late brother Cygnus had been among the Death Eaters that attacked Hartsfield the night of James and Severus' betrothal celebration, despite that their cousin Dorea had been a Potter by marriage.

Of Cygnus' three daughters, the eldest was Bellatrix Lestrange, the second was Andromeda Tonks had run off with a muggleborn and was in hiding with him and their child, and the third was Narcissa Malfoy, who was willing to betray the Dark Lord along with her husband. Altogether, it was quite the mess, and that didn't even account for the more extended Black clan. The blood adoption would keep Lily safe though, and that was the most important part to Severus.

# We Happy Few

## Chapter Notes

Chapter title obviously ganked from Henry V's St. Crispin's Day Speech ala Shakespeare. In case you're wondering, I like the Branagh version and the Hiddleston version equally, although I had never thought I'd like another version as much as Kenneth Branagh's, which was the first I ever watched.

If you're wondering, for this work I fancast Aiden Turner as Sirius Black, and young Sean Bean (like, Lady Chatterley's Lover era Sean Bean) as Remus Lupin, because that is a good looking bit of rough.

Some reconciliation between James and Sirius this chapter, and Sirius finally gets to explain himself a bit. Also a fair bit of domestic fluff after I abuse my babies a bit.

**Warnings for this chapter:** Non graphic birth scene, and generally not being as nice to our babes as the last few chapters, including off screen but discussed loss of limb. I know I've mentioned medical marijuana usage before, but from this chapter on it's discussed a bit more, and is shown in this and later chapters. Also some discussion of birth control and dangerous pregnancies, but again nothing graphic. Excuse the dog Latin of my made up spell incantations.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The next few months were quite hectic. Severus was back and forth with some frequency to Grimsthorpe and Amounderness, plus nursing Mother Potter, caring for Hadrian, and overseeing the rebuilding of James' family estate, Hartsfield. He also had his regular checkups to ensure that his pregnancy was progressing properly, and his duties as a Peer of Magical Britain. At the same time, James was also quite busy. While he worked 'regular' hours as an Auror, he was also on call many nights, and would have to leave their bed on call outs at all hours.

Whenever James was called out, Severus would sit up and wait for him. He didn't have to, he knew, and he trusted James' skills as an Auror. But Severus never slept properly when he knew James was in danger, and so he would read through Wizengamot minutes, or do research, or just sit and watch their Hadrian sleep. He became quite proficient at numerous handicrafts, and Stormholme soon boasted new tapestry pillows and embroidered hangings in many of the salons and parlours, executed while Severus sat up nights, waiting for his husband to safely return.

Some nights, Alina would sit with him or Lily or Alice would come keep company with him, and Remus was often an overnight guest at Stormholme. Still, having someone to sit up with him didn't lessen Severus' anxiety in the least. As such, when the floo flared green the night after Beltane, Severus was instantly on alert, his wand in hand. Severus set aside his stitchery, standing to lay his hand on the hearth's wardstone. The wards indicated that the other end was connected at the DMLE, but if it had been James, he would have been able to come through without the wards stopping him. Which meant something was wrong.

Severus lowered the floo ward hesitantly, grasping his wand tight and casting a Healer's green-staff shield over himself just in case. James' Watch Captain, Rufus Scrimgeour stepped through, leonine face grim. Severus sat hurriedly, dropping his shield as he blanched in alarm. Rufus

grimaced slightly, as he looked Severus over.

“James?” Severus asked.

“He’s alive,” Scrimgeour reassured immediately. “He was hit in the arm with a curse we’ve never seen before. He’s been transported to St. Panteleimon’s, it’s more secure than Mungo’s at the moment.” Scrimgeour was gruff and abrupt, but not unsympathetic, and while not terribly likeable, Severus couldn’t help but respect the older Slytherin, especially given the prejudices commonly held against their shared house these days.

“I need to let the others know, but I’ll be there directly,” Severus said firmly, and stood. He swayed as he gained his feet though, and then collapsed with a soft sound of pain. Scrimgeour leapt to catch Severus, and grimaced more pronouncedly as he felt the gravid wizard’s abdomen clench ominously beneath his steady hand.

“Wake the house, I use Healer Rancic out of Panteleimon’s,” Severus gasped, clutching at his stomach as he came to the same unwelcome conclusion as Scrimgeour - he was having the baby, and he was having her in a hurry. It was too soon. He was only six months along. “Hurry,” he gasped painedly. Standing, Scrimgeour looked about warily. He hadn’t been to Stormholme in many long years, but he thought he remembered where the family quarters were. At a fast lope, Scrimgeour set out.

Soon the entire house was roused as directed, and then Scrimgeour was flooing back to St. Panteleimon’s with Remus Lupin while the birthing Healer set up her things there on the floor of the receiving room, not wanting to move Severus. Alina floo called Grimsthorpe and Amounderness, and Alice and Lily soon stepped through with their sons, Cassiopeia Black following shortly. Cassiopeia went up to sit with Mother Potter, while Alina, Alice, and Lily assisted the Healer.

When James returned home three days later, he found Severus on bed rest, and Lily and Alina taking care of Hadrian and his new daughter, Cordelia Sabrina Eileen Prince-Potter. James swallowed thickly as he limped wearily to the bed. The entire time he had been in the hospital, his mind had been turning in circles as he drove himself half-mad with fear that Severus or their child, or both, would die. Even without much medical training, James could see it would be touch and go for a while.

James sagged against the bed, leaning forward awkwardly to hug Severus one armed. James had demanded that his husband not be told anything further about his condition, save that he was doing well and recovering nicely. It was the truth, if rather modified, but James hadn’t wanted any setbacks for his husband. Severus turned slightly into the hug, blinking fully awake.

“Jamie?” Severus asked sleepily.

“I’m here my love,” James affirmed, his voice lower than usual and husky with emotion.

“I was so worried,” Severus said softly, reaching up to stroke his fingers through James’ ill kept hair. Sharp dark eyes looked James over carefully, cataloguing the new scars on his face, the tightness around his eyes from pain and worry, and the arm in its sling. “Tell me?” he asked hopefully. Severus had always dealt better with having all the facts.

“They - they couldn’t stop the curse completely,” James admitted. “They did their best, but it’s something new, something they hadn’t seen before, and it moves fast. I was hit on the wand hand, and by the time I got to the hospital it was halfway up to my elbow. They did what they could, but amputation was the only real option to save the rest of my arm, possibly my life.” Severus let out a

low whimper, reaching out hesitantly.

“It’s alright,” James said, and tried to smile. It wasn’t a very convincing expression. Severus gently undid the sling, his dark eyes tearing as he saw the damage. James’ arm had been amputated just below the elbow. White gauze bandages swathed the residual arm where it extended past his sleeve, but the end of his truncated arm was bleeding, the bandages already dark with blood despite having been changed just that morning.

“The Aurory has put me on disability, but I won’t be able to return to active duty unless I can pass the tests using my other hand,” James said evenly. He’d been practicing what to say to Severus since he woke up, so it came out steadily, as if it didn’t half kill him to lose his position as a field Auror. “I haven’t decided yet if I’ll put in a transfer to desk work in the DMLE, I just want to be with you and the children for a while.” He knew he couldn’t ride a desk immediately, it would be too much, the mental wound too raw, and it would take time to train himself to use his left hand for everything.

“I want you home as well,” Severus admitted, although he knew better than anyone how much being an Auror meant to James. “I - I know you want to be out there, helping, but I - I couldn’t bear losing you Jamie.”

“Nor I, you darling,” James said gently, and leaned in to kiss Severus softly. “Now, where’s my new daughter?” Severus smiled wanly at that, and snapped for an elf. It soon brought the new baby, swaddled in a deep red blanket with an all over leaping stag motif in gold, in honour of the Gryffindor and Peverell blood that ran in James’ veins. Another elf followed with Hadrian, dressed in a green romper with a golden snidget design.

“Your daughter, Cordelia Sabrina Eileen Prince-Potter,” Severus introduced. She was tiny, smaller than Hadrian had been when just born. Like her elder brother though, she had a thatch of downy dark hair on her little brown head. Her features, slightly squished, were a good combination of both parents, James thought. She had a little button nose, but beneath the chub of her rounded cheeks, he thought she had Severus’ sharp bone structure.

“She’s beautiful,” James said softly. Carefully he cradled her into his good arm, ducking his head to kiss her splotchy forehead. “My beautiful girl.” Severus smiled slightly at that.

“She’s perfectly healthy, just smaller than she would have been if she had been carried longer,” Severus reassured. He didn’t mention that he had been in greater danger from the early labour than their daughter had been, not wanting to scare James. After all, they had not entirely in jest planned to have enough children to field a wholly Prince-Potter quidditch team. Severus still wanted that, although he had agreed with Healer Rancic to go on birth control for a while; another pregnancy too soon might kill him, and while Severus wanted more children, he was just as passionate about taking care of the two he already had.

As promised, James was home for the next while. He began attending the Wizengamot sessions himself, although they asked Remus to continue voting the Prince seats as an excuse to have him over with some frequency. The Wizengamot wasn’t really a full time job though. With Severus on bed rest, James picked up some of the things Severus had been doing, specifically the charitable work, and the rebuilding of Hartsfield. He also began taking more of an active interest in the businesses the Potters were invested in.

When little Cordelia was a few months old, they had her naming ceremony and Blessing, this time asking the Longbottoms to act as godparents. They agreed happily, and Alice whispered in quiet confidence to Severus and Lily that she was fairly certain she was newly with child herself, although the charm wouldn’t be able to tell with a hundred percent certainty for a week or so yet.



Less than a week later though, Alice flooded them in a frenzy; she had finally discovered Dumbledore's interest in their three sons, and it chilled all three families to the core.

"A prophecy," Alice said in sepulchral tones when they convened at Grimsthorpe, the safest location since all of them boasted Black blood within the past few generations. "The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies," she recited off. "Dumbledore says that he thinks someone overheard the first half, and Moldysnorts will know it. And his spies - he'll know who fits the criteria."

"Why in the name of Jove has he not said anything to us? To Lily?" Severus asked, incensed. A protective magical aura began to spark in the air around Severus, proof of how truly outraged he was. A soothing warmth reached out to him through his connection with James though, and he reined in his anger, knowing that it could affect not only his own reactions, but those of his husband and children. "I know Jamie doesn't listen to him as closely as when we were students, but that's ridiculous! He would leave us unknowing? With that madman after us? I know our wards are good, and we take precautions, but we should know what we're up against! He'll be hunting all three of our families."

"And our blood will be a liability to you," Lord Black said darkly. "All three of you have ties to the family, but Lady LeStrange is also of Black blood," he said, nodding at James, Frank, and Lily.

"Can you not cast her out?" Severus all but plead, not for the first time. "She does no honour to the family, Uncle."

"I cannot do it by myself, the family must at least mostly agree," Lord Black reminded, as this was a conversation they had had before, and would likely have again. "There is a reason young Sirius is still acknowledged by us, for all he would disown us." Severus grimaced slightly, but nodded in acceptance. He was still coming to terms with his own heritage, which made him distantly a cousin to Sirius.

"Speaking of Sirius," James said that night, when they had returned to Stormholme, and Severus looked over, eyes widening. He wouldn't - couldn't - try to keep James from his old friend, he knew that wouldn't go over well, but he hadn't thought they'd reconcile either; Sirius was intractable. "He approached me at the Ministry today, boasting about his forthcoming promotion, how he'd soon have you exposed. Moody went after Rosier, lost one of his legs and half his nose. I got the impression that Sirius had been about to be kicked out, but they've just lost too many Aurors. They can't afford to let him go, despite the poor reputation he brings the department." Severus grimaced at that.

"I know you don't go out much, not in public anyway, I just wanted to warn you to be careful. Despite that there's never been even a hint of official suspicion about your alliances, I'm afraid he might take a shot at you if he thought he could get away with it," James said. Severus swallowed thickly, and nodded. As James had said, there could be no question about Severus' loyalties, but Black had never let something like that stop him.

"I'll be careful," Severus promised softly. Despite that promise, Severus couldn't watch everyone all the time. It wasn't Sirius that ended up getting him though. Severus had gone to get a few things on Diagon Alley; he needed new robes, and as he'd had two children since his last measurements were taken, he felt he ought to go in and get re-measured. As he was leaving the couturier he preferred with the children in their pram, he was struck without warning from behind.

Severus collapsed with a sharp cry. Instantly the other shoppers were screaming and running. Severus sobbed in pain, feeling his body temperature skyrocket. With the very small part of him that could think through the pain, Severus cast a Healer's green staff shield over the pram to keep the babies from being harmed. He could distantly hear a high female voice, and then red magelight sizzled past him. Small, cool hands brushed his face, pinned his shoulders to the cobbled street.

"It - it was *haemofurnus*, I don't know the counter," Severus heard distantly. *Haemofurnus*, the blood burning curse. He had less than five minutes. He tried to gather his strength, tried to find a good memory. All he could think was that he wouldn't live to raise his children, that they needed five more to field an all Prince-Potter quidditch team. He wanted to send a *patronus* to Jamie, and all he could think through the pain was that he'd never see his beloved husband again. He reached for their marriage bond, the thread of magic that linked them heart and soul, and sent his desperate love while trying to hide his pain and terror.

"Merciful Mungo," a bystander exclaimed.

"Blood burning curse, do you know the counter?" someone demanded.

"Let me through, let me through," a masculine voice demanded, and distantly Severus could hear Cordelia wailing. Like the counter to Severus' invention *sectumsempra*, the spell that negated the *haemofurnus* was sung or chanted - *frigus sanguinem, frigus sanguinem, frigus sanguinem*. A sudden chill washed over and through Severus, and then his shoulders were being gently cradled up. The cool lip of a glass phial was pressed to his lower lip. "Drink, it's a pain reliever and muscle relaxant," the voice urged. It sounded familiar, Severus thought foggily, then swallowed the potion that was poured into his lax mouth.

"Very?!" James' familiar voice called, and Severus tried to open his eyes, tried to turn so he could see his husband.

"Hush, be still," the voice urged softly. "Healers are on their way," the voice said more loudly in explanation. "I don't want to move him until he's seen by a Healer. I'm deputizing you; take the prisoner in, then meet us at Mungo's." There was a long, tense silence, and Severus again tried to shift, to see James. The pain was too much though, Severus still felt as though he was burning from the inside out despite that the countercurse had taken hold in his blood.

"I'll be back Very. Black, call someone from Grimsthorpe to come pick up the kids. I don't want them at Mungo's. If it's possible, take Very to Pant.s' instead," James' voice said, sterner than Severus had ever heard. Black. Sirius then, and he'd saved Severus' life. Severus shivered despite the unnatural heat that raced through him still. He was beholden to Sirius Black. The thought raced through Severus' pain-fogged mind, and he couldn't seem to grasp hold of it properly.

"My babies," Severus rasped, and was hushed for his trouble.

"I need to give you a fever reducer," Black said. "With your temperature so high, it will have to include a sedative so you don't fit." Severus couldn't really respond, and a moment later the potion trickled into his mouth. The world faded, and Severus dropped into unconsciousness. Finally, the green-staff shield over the pram flickered and faded.

Severus woke three days later at St. Panteleimon's. James was slumped in one of the chairs near the bed, haggard and unshaven, and a mediwitch was bustling about, humming softly to herself as she performed the usual charms for a long term patient, relieving Severus' bladder and freshening his mouth, cleansing his ashy golden brown skin and switching out the sheets. Severus let out a soft sound of distress, and the mediwitch was instantly at his side, casting diagnostics while she spoke in a soft, soothing voice, telling him what day it was and what had happened.

He had been brought in by Auror Sirius Black, suffering from the aftereffects of the blood burning curse. The counter had been given within the five minute threshold for full recovery, so eventually Severus would be fine. In the meantime, he would be on a strict regimen of fever reducers, blood thinners, muscle relaxants, and antispasmodics. He was also on strict bedrest; he would be a month more in the hospital in case of relapse, and after that, another month of bedrest at home, longer if possible, and he was informed it would be best for him to as little magic as possible, as certain spells - mostly those associated with fire, but not only those - might trigger a relapse. James woke as the mediwitch was speaking, and listened carefully. After a while, and a few potions, she bustled off, leaving James and Severus alone.

“The children?” Severus asked softly after a time, his mind still catching up with the information dump.

“They are well, unharmed,” James reassured. “They’re with Alice and Frank, at Amounderness. Lily picked them up, with Remus, and brought them to Grimsthorpe first, but we thought it best they not remain there long, given the circumstances.”

“And - and Black?” Severus asked even more quietly.

“He - is solicitous - apologetic,” James said quietly. “I - I think seeing you attacked, hurt, and the babies in danger, because of a Marked Death Eater, it’s brought home what I’ve said all along, that you’re nothing like we painted you as when we were boys. I - I’m not sure he’s changed utterly, but he - he begins to see. He begins.” Severus nodded, understanding somewhat. It was hard to overcome years of preconceptions, and sometimes it took a drastic measure to understand that you were wrong. Severus just wished he hadn’t been Sirius’ paradigm shifting event.

“Who?” Severus asked in a tiny voice, not sure he wanted to know. What if it was someone like Archie Avery, who he’d once thought of as something like a friend? Would that make it worse, he wondered, knowing that someone who’d slept in the same room as him for years had wanted to boil him alive with his own blood? Had they chosen that curse because they had always known his blood was ‘dirty’ on account of his mother’s husband, the man he’d so long thought was his father?

“Alecto Carrow,” James said grimly, cutting into Severus’ circling thoughts. Severus nodded, vaguely relieved not to recognize the name from anything but the DMLE dossiers. “She has a brother, Amycus, who will likely be out for revenge. Both are suspected Death Eaters. From what the Aurory has been able to tell, she simply saw you on the street and took her chance. We don’t know if this is related to the prophecy or not; both you and I are targets on our own.” Severus nodded sleepily. His mind felt sluggish, and so he relaxed back into the bed.

“Bring the children?” Severus asked hopefully. “And we shall need a wet nurse.” James nodded at that, taking mental notes to ensure that Severus would have as few worries as possible while he was laid up in hospital.

It was almost Hadrian’s first birthday before Severus was released from St. Panteleimon’s. Severus had, on second thought, forbidden James from bringing the children to see him, afraid that they would be in danger if brought out in public. He forbade Alice and Lily from bringing their children either. Both young mothers visited with Severus with some frequency though, and Remus was by at least once a week. Each time Alice came, she brought Severus marijuana oil or a handful of cigarettes rolled from a strain she was improving to help with his pain management.

With a mischievous laugh, Alice had informed Severus and Lily that she had already trademarked the name ‘Longbottom Leaf’ for when she had it bred to the potency she desired. Only muggleborns and those knowledgeable in muggle culture would get the joke, but Alice thought it rather ingenious. Sirius Black came once, for a very tense official interview, but thankfully hadn’t

come a second time. Kingsley had come a few times as well, although he and Severus didn't know one another well. Still, any visitor was welcome, as Severus had not been blessed with an excess of patience.

Finally though, on 27 July 1981, Severus was sent home. He was still recovering, and the Healers wanted him to be on strict bedrest for another month. He couldn't much argue though, so long as he was allowed to go home and see his children. The children, although they had missed Severus, were too young really to understand the whys and wherefores of his absence. He was glad to see them though, and had James, or an elf, or whoever else was in the house bring them to his bedside frequently.

After a few days, a second bed was put in Mother Potter's room, and Severus moved in there, so that the two of them, both on bedrest, could keep one another company. Alina sat with them, and Severus, when he was feeling strong enough, would help her amuse Leonora with gossip or by reading aloud. When Leonora was resting, Severus would read to himself, or work on his stitchery. The wet nurse stayed on as well, as the time away from the children had caused Severus' milk to dry up. Hadrian at least was old enough to start taking some solid food.

Although Sirius had stayed away from the hospital, he had begun talking to James again through stilted letters, and a few short meetings on the neutral ground of Grimsthorpe. James didn't want to bring his former friend into the home he shared with Severus, not until he could trust Sirius not to belittle or harm Severus, and James wasn't sure when that would be. Their conversations were awkward, more tense silences than actual exchanges.

James tried with varying degrees of success to explain how perfect the match was between himself and Severus, the way their magic resonated and Severus' caution tempered James' recklessness. But Sirius had little use for caution, and feeling the resonance of your magic in a partner was so rare as to seem like so much stuff and nonsense. Remus too worked on getting Sirius to accept James and Severus' relationship. After all, he had the perspective of an outsider, but was so frequently at Stormholme with the Prince-Potter clan that he could speak at length about just how much James and Severus adored one another. Finally, irritated with James' irritation, Severus took matters into his own hands.

Having completed his theses for his Mastery in Potions and his Healer certification while he was on bed rest, Severus was rather at loose ends. He still needed to do the practical portions of his apprenticeships to be fully qualified as both a Potions Master and a Healer, but he was much closer. It also freed up his overactive mind to think about numerous other things. Chief among these things was the continued tension between James and Sirius Black, which clearly upset James.

Resultant to Severus' scheming, James returned from work one Friday, having recently started minding a desk in the DMLE, to find Alina, Lily, Remus, the Longbottoms, and Severus in their favorite sitting room, drinking tea with Sirius Black. Sirius looked rather uncomfortable about the whole thing, and when James looked questioningly at Remus, the werewolf silently directed him to Severus. Facing his bonded, James raised both eyebrows in question. Severus raised a single eyebrow in response, clearly not impressed.

"Er, welcome?" James offered, turning to catch Sirius' hopeful but pained gaze. Severus sighed and rolled his eyes.

"You're hopeless my love," Severus murmured, setting aside his tumbler of juice and rising. He crossed to James and swept the robes from James' shoulders, kissing him on the cheek. "Make up, or don't. I'm sick of this indecision. Where's that vaunted Gryffindor courage?" Severus asked softly.

“Hey!” James argued, smiling and trying to quell his fear. Severus gave him another unimpressed look.

“Ladies, let’s go check on the children,” Severus called back over his shoulder, heading for the door with James’ wand and robes.

“I’ll escort you,” Frank offered wisely, giving Alice his arm. Alice nodded, hauling herself up, and Lily and Alina followed the Longbottoms and Severus out of the room. Remus looked after them with no small amount of envy, but remained, knowing that a mediator might be necessary.

“I don’t trust you,” James said firmly as soon as the room cleared, crossing his arms defensively over his chest as he turned to face Sirius. “You’ve never had a neutral word for Severus, never mind a kind one, and now we’re just supposed to be friends again? After all the horrid things you’ve said about him? After all the times you’ve hurt him?”

“And you have the monopoly on making mistakes? On earning forgiveness?” Sirius returned, his voice low and clearly hurt. “I know I’ve been terrible to Severus. And I’m not going to pretend that this is easy, will be easy, or that he and I will ever be friends. But I miss you James. I miss having someone I trusted at my back. I - I can’t tell you how many times over the past few years I’ve turned my head to tell you something stupid, and you weren’t there, and it about broke my heart. Old man Black says you’re friends with the Malfoys. Have I hurt you more than them? Earned less forgiveness?”

“Okay, first, he’s not supposed to tell anyone about that,” James grouched. “Second, we’re not friends. Third, Lucius protected Severus, and never hurt me personally. He’s never been a friend to me, but he’s not made himself my enemy either Sirius. I tried to tell you how I felt about Severus from the beginning. You didn’t believe me, treated our relationship like it was some long joke, treated me like you thought I might be mad for wanting him, or maybe under the *imperius*. Siri, he - he’s everything to me, him and the kids. I don’t - I can’t explain it Sirius. I don’t know how to make you understand that he’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“I don’t know either,” Sirius admitted. “But honestly James, I’m not sure I need to understand. I mean, I know I need to accept that you love him, that you’re bonded and have kids and you’ve turned into a regular old boring bastard. But I don’t need to really understand you know? I’m not sure I could, without falling in love that same way myself. But I - I *have* accepted James. I know - I know that Severus isn’t the enemy, and I just - I don’t know how to make things right with you.”

“I don’t know either,” James admitted. “If I had my way, you’d never have set foot in our home.”

“James,” Remus cautioned, and James sighed, reaching up to tug at the lengthening coils of his forelock. Now that he wasn’t an Auror in the field, he’d been letting his hair grow a bit, and Severus had learned from Lily how to care for James’ locks properly, oiling and combing and twisting his hair so it began to approximate curls rather than a disordered mass of springy coils.

“I know, I know, not helpful,” James grouched, then sighed again. “I don’t know, okay, and I know that isn’t terribly helpful either. I just don’t know what will make me comfortable with you being around Severus. I mean, obviously fighting would be bad, and if you ever disrespect him -”

“I know,” Sirius cut in. “I know, okay. I mean, I know I usually flagrantly ignore all the manners my parents ever taught me, but I did learn them, okay? I don’t intend to be mean or disrespectful, and anytime I’m here, I’ll be here under guest-friendship.”

“Not that that helped anything at Grimsthorpe,” James said darkly, and Sirius sighed.

"I'm sorry," Sirius said, the frustration bleeding into his voice. "I know that was stupid James, I've already heard all about it from my entire family, who seem to all like you and Severus much more than they like me."

"Maybe because we don't treat them all like they're Moldysorts," James sniped back. Sirius sighed again, rolling his eyes dramatically, and Remus rubbed his hand tiredly over his face, feeling like he might be the only adult in the room. "Not helpful, I know Moony," James said, knowing that he was out of line. Still, if Sirius had offended James, James would likely laugh it off as nothing. Any slight against Severus though, that was enough to have James preparing for war.

"Look, I'm not saying everything goes back to the way it was before, I know that isn't possible," Sirius said tiredly. "But how can we fix things, how can *I* fix things if you won't even let me show that I'm trying? I know I'm on thin ice at the Aurory, and my relationship with my family is pretty much nonexistent. I may not be the smartest wizard in our year, but even I can tell that all the problems in my life have a commonality, and that commonality seems to be, well, me," Sirius acknowledged.

"Sirius," Remus said, his voice strained.

"It's true Moony!" Sirius exclaimed, cheeks flushing and storm grey eyes growing feverish-bright. "I decided the rest of the world could go hang when I was ten, and I haven't looked back, and all it's gotten me is a lot of hurt feelings, both my own and others. What have I really got to show for it? So I'm an Auror, I know damn well the only reason I haven't been sacked is because the department is desperate for warm bodies. Hell, I'm pretty sure there are a few sympathizers in the corps, and no one seems to care, because they're too damn necessary." James nodded, then narrowed his eyes.

"How do you feel about Dumbledore?" James asked.

"James," Remus warned, and James waved him quiet, waiting with narrowed eyes.

"He hasn't done anything for me lately, why?" Sirius asked cagily, seeing that this was something terribly important to James, even if Sirius didn't yet understand why.

"He warned Alice and Frank about some prophecy, about a boy born at the end of July," James said, and Sirius blanched, knowing quite well that both James' son and Lily's were born around that time.

"I take it he didn't warn you?" Sirius asked shrewdly, and James jerked his head to the side in negation.

"He can't just tell everyone everything James," Remus defended.

"And what has he done for *you* lately?" James accused, turning to Remus. "You know as well as I do that if he'd spoken up there was no way those anti-were legislations would have passed, and every time you agree to do something for him, you come back beat up. He's not your friend Remus, he doesn't care about you as anything more than a useful follower in his own personal army."

"I - I don't know the whole of it Moony, but I'd be careful," Sirius said tentatively. "We all know that we got away with a lot more than we ought to have at Hogwarts, and while I haven't heard peep from Dumbledore since, I'm guessing that's mostly because he doesn't think that I'm of much use to him." Sirius snorted, a sound not terribly unlike a bark. "Hell, the way my life is going, he probably thinks I've joined up with You-Know-Who."

“Moldyshorts,” James corrected by habit, and Sirius let out a bark of laughter, although he tried to stifle it. Sirius snorted through his hands, then descended into hilarity.

“Moldyshorts,” Sirius wheezed, and James just stood there, more than a little proud at the admittedly terrible moniker. Remus just shook his head, ever more convinced he needed better friends, and glad he had Severus and Lily around for adult conversation.

“Alright, I think my work here is done,” Remus said with fond exasperation, and went off to find the others. It wasn’t too much of a surprise that they were actually in the nursery, Hadrian, Antares, and Neville babbling at each other on a cushy play mat on the floor, while Severus held Cordelia, who was cooing rather adorably. Remus couldn’t help his fond smile. His father had always been distant, and while he loved his mother, this was his chosen family.

“Look, there’s Uncle Moony,” Lily greeted, reaching over to tickle Antares, who was laying on his back and gnawing on a stuffed dragon. Severus narrowed his eyes slightly, looking between the two of them. Lily caught Severus’ gaze, and her cheeks darkened noticeably. A slow, smug smile stretched over Severus’ mouth. He’d suspected Remus was fond of Lily for some time. Now that he’d noticed a fondness on Lily’s part, he could begin matchmaking. He’d have to watch more closely to be sure first, though.

Glancing at the Longbottoms, Severus bit back a sigh of disappointment that neither of them seemed to have noticed the interaction between Remus and Lily. He’d have to bring Alice up to date, and see what she suggested. He looked at Alina next, but she was bent over an adorable set of pale celadon green baby robes for Cordelia, deftly embroidering a foliate edging in darker green silks. No help there either, at least, not until he told her she’d be helping.

“So have the boys resolved their differences, or have you come to warn us it’s all out war?” Severus asked, and Remus tore his gaze from Lily and Antares, blinking somewhat dazedly. Severus bit back a grin of amusement. It seemed there was hope for Remus and Lily then, or at least mutual attraction. Remus’ lycanthropy could pose a problem - mostly because Remus refused to believe that werewolves were worthy of love and care, but if Severus could perfect an anti-transformation potion based off of Damocles Belby’s Wolfsbane, it would be as good as a cure.

“Well they haven’t killed each other,” Remus said bemusedly. “I wouldn’t say they’re back to being best mates, but that will take time.”

“Of course,” Severus agreed. “I know very well how James is when I’m slighted.” The others, who also knew this trait quite well, laughed softly. It was very true though, that while James had a forgiving and generous nature in most instances, he wouldn’t hear a word against Severus or their family. “Very well. Let’s let them be a bit longer. Kingsley should be here in a bit for supper.”

“We’re having a regular party, aren’t we?” Alice asked with a smile, and Severus shrugged.

“I figured it would be for the best if there were reinforcements at hand in case of either a fight or just you know - awkwardness,” Severus explained, and Alice and Lily giggled.

“Is Kingsley bringing anyone?” Alina asked.

“I don’t know,” Severus admitted. “I don’t know if he’s seeing anyone at the moment. I thought there was something between him and one of the Healers I knew in Edinburgh, Aisha Shafiq, but he hasn’t mentioned her in a while, so perhaps not. Why, do you fancy him?” he teased.

“Ha, no,” Alina laughed. “He is much too young for me, darling,” she scolded, wagging her finger at Severus. “But he is a good man, he should find a wife and have a family.”

"I've tried introducing him around," Frank said with a broad grin. "The trouble is, all the witches think he's too damn good looking, so none of them chase him down." They shared a laugh at that, and gossiped for a while until Severus felt the floo wards go off. Severus excused himself, and was soon welcoming Kingsley through. Kingsley hadn't brought a date, and Severus resolved himself to more matchmaking. Bringing him through to the parlour, Severus left him with James and Sirius, then went to fetch the others before helping Mother Potter down the stairs.

It was a rather nice dinner party all told, although there were still some awkward pauses. Whenever the Aurors in the room started talking business, Severus would interrupt them with a soft cough and disappointed look, and Lily would scold them for bringing their work home. The awkwardness eased as the evening drew on, and Severus brought down Hadrian and Cordelia, who had eaten earlier, to say goodnight to their father around eight. Sirius couldn't deny, watching them, that the Prince-Potters made quite the handsome family. The kissing of the babies was the signal for the others to get going though, and so Lily and Sirius were soon off to Grimsthorpe, the Longbottoms to Amounderness, and Kingsley to his London flat.

"So I've been thinking," James said the next morning as he and Severus went over the recent Wizengamot rulings.

"Uh oh," Severus teased, looking up with a smile from the boring bulletin.

"Ha ha," James groused, unable to keep from smiling back at Severus. "Anyway, I don't like desk work, not like this. I know I haven't been at it long but I - I just don't - it's not the same," he settled on saying. "And I know being home is - getting old for you." Severus wavered, but nodded. While he did love being home with the children, he also wanted to be doing more, helping with the war effort. "What if we switched?" James proposed. "The wet nurse is working out great for feeding the little monsters, and I'm more interested in the Potter Legacy stuff than the DMLE at the moment. I know Crouch does what he can, but the place is a cesspool."

"If you'd be happy, I won't say no," Severus admitted. "I would like to rejoin SaRACo." James grimaced slightly, but nodded. As much as James disliked the idea of Severus being in danger, he knew very well that Severus, like himself, wanted to be out there helping. "Would Scrimgeour let us do it on a trial run?" Severus asked. "Or whoever makes that decision?"

"It would probably be Robards, since he replaced Moody as Head Auror," James said thoughtfully. "I'll send him a letter and ask, and write Crouch too. I doubt Crouch will be pleased, but I don't think he can be too upset if it gets another member of SaRACo. back in the field, especially since battlefield Healers are rather thin on the ground."

"I guess I should start getting back in shape then," Severus said with a slight smirk. He paused, his face softening. "You know that when you want to try, I'd be happy to help you get your left handed casting up to snuff."

"I know," James said with a pained smile. He knew also that there would be no better teacher. Severus was the rare lefthanded wizard, and in school the professors had at first tried to train him to cast right handed so that he could be taught using the standardised motions, but Severus had stubbornly insisted on learning the mirrors of the standard motions, and casting from the left. It was part of what made him so difficult to duel, as most wizards unconsciously left that side open, expecting a right handed attack. "But I'd be a liability right now, even if I could pass the tests to get back in the field. My head wouldn't be in it," James explained.

"Well I guess you'll just have to take over my very important task of getting Lily and Remus together then," Severus said evenly, then broke out in quiet laughter as James goggled at him. "It's true!" Severus gasped out. "I've been saying he was sweet on her for ages, but last night they were



making eyes at one another all evening, and you know Remus will never approach her, he's too caught up in being a broody werewolf who must suffer in silence and loneliness."

"He is rather melodramatic, isn't he," James said with a fond smile. "Well, I can't promise anything, I'd probably do more harm than good on that front."

"Oh I know, I'm going to set Auntie and Alice on them," Severus said with a rather mischievous smile.

"Oh. Well - good?" James returned rather tentatively, and Severus just smiled, leaning over to kiss his husband on the corner of his mouth.

It took a few weeks after that discussion, both for them to get permission and for Severus to get back into fighting form, but then they made the switch off, Severus once more an active member of SaRACo. and St. Panteleimon's Forward Triage Unit. Because of his work at St. Panteleimon's, Severus was stationed out of the smaller Edinburgh Auror Office, which was hidden in the back room of a rather dismal little tourist information shop that no one ever entered.

The switch was quite the change of pace for Severus, although no less so for James. It raised tensions at Stormholme for a few weeks until things settled, Severus shorter tempered than usual with workplace stress, and James driven to distraction with worry. In mid-September though, when Severus had been back with SaRACo. for a couple weeks, there was an all hands call from London. The Death Eaters had decided to attack Diagon Alley.

Severus geared up quickly, securing his hair, his various portkeys and protective amulets, his bag of emergency use potions, back up wand, knife, and sterile mask. Throwing his Healer's green cloak around his shoulders, Severus took a deep breath to calm his racing pulse, then grasped hold of his portkey and spoke the activation phrase. Healers from St. Mungo's already had a triage station set up on the steps of Gringott's bank, the goblins providing protection.

Wand in hand, Severus entered the fray. The rhythm came back to him as if he'd never left. He hexed and cursed in one breath, danced from danger and dodged to heal with his next step. It was invigorating, and Severus couldn't believe how much he had missed the rush of fighting and healing both. He shielded, ducking over a little girl. He checked her pulse and vitals, found her okay but scared, and gently helped her into one of the barricaded storefronts nearby.

Severus returned from work exhilarated that night, and while it was clear that James had been on tenterhooks all day, they were easier after that, James accepting more readily that Severus could take care of himself. As Severus had said from the start, he was no damsel in distress, no maiden in need of a knight. Not that James stopped worrying, but it got better; with each engagement from which Severus safely returned, it got better.

It helped also, that Remus was around frequently to take James' mind off things, and Sirius visited occasionally as well, although usually if Sirius was there at least one of James' other friends from the Aurory was as well. Still, someone to talk at meant James worried less, and with Sirius stopping by, it gave them a chance to repair their broken friendship. Not that there weren't arguments. More than once Severus came home from a long day of brewing, healing, and research, ready to collapse, and instead found James sulking about the house because he and Sirius had gotten into a tiff.

As summer gave way to fall, attacks by the Death Eaters came with less frequency, but when they attacked, the results were usually much grimmer. A clear pattern emerged as well. By the end of September, twelve muggle or mixed families with magical children of various ages but with late July birthdays had been killed in their homes. Those with the knowledge or gold had their homes

extensively guarded, but only those who knew the prophecy understood the fullness of what was happening. Voldemort was hunting for his foretold vanquisher.

## Chapter End Notes

Yes, I left a few Easter eggs in here. Longbottom Leaf was originally from the Shire, but Alice insisted. The Edinburgh Auror Office is based loosely off the Torchwood HQ in Cardiff, but really only just a passing nod.

Now, I'm sure I'll get a couple questions about my decision to have James injured resulting in loss of limb. But let's face it, the boys are fighting a war. That results in grave injury and potentially death. While people close to the boys have died, and they've acquired a few scars of their own, I also wanted to show the increasing danger they were in.

Okay. So. I originally started posting this to motivate myself to finish the work. Next weeks chapter is the first of the 'new' chapters, and also the beginning of the end. I have chapters eight and nine written and pretty well polished, so they'll be on time next week and the week after, and I have a chapter ten that's really more of a short epilogue. I'm so pleased by the wonderful reception y'all have given me for this fanfic, and I hope you enjoy the last few chapters.

# We Await a Protector

## Chapter Notes

This is the first chapter that is entirely 'new' since I started posting, so I guess that bit of self motivation is working, at least a little. I first had the idea for this fic two years ago, and so although I've edited and reworked extensively as I went, I'm also just trying to finish this at this point, without doing a disservice to my ~\*original vision\*~.

There is some talk of end of life decisions and Alzheimers like symptoms in this chapter, and I kill off some more OCs. Also, things get a bit - ghostly. Totally didn't plan on that, but I've never been much for plans, so, there it is.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

With his hereditary seat as a Peer of the Wizengamot, and Severus' full support, James began advocating for a number of changes in the magical world. It was clear that Voldemort somehow had access to a list of magical children too young for Hogwarts. Someone else ought also have access to that list, James argued, both to protect those children who were otherwise vulnerable to attack by the Death Eaters, and also to allow them to learn of the magical world at an earlier age, lessening the shock of exposing them to an entirely new culture at the same time they were to be taken from their homes and parents for formal training.

Lily was more than happy to testify in James' support, giving chapter and verse about how important it had been for her to have Severus nearby growing up, so he and his mother Eileen could tell her and her parents about the magical world. Although James only thought to ask for Lily's individual support, she did him one better. Lily contacted every other muggleborn or muggle-raised halfblood she knew, and got them in contact with James so they could testify as well. Many of course, weren't willing to stand up in front of the Wizengamot. Being so public about one's lack of blood purity was the equivalent of painting a big target on one's back for the Death Eaters, and the traditionalists in the Wizengamot weren't terribly polite in their questioning of those they viewed as lesser wixen.

All the same, Lily, James, Severus, and many of their friends felt it was an important discussion to have. Lily knew that her own situation growing up, with her parents overawed and joyous upon the discovery she was a witch, was somewhat atypical. It was rather startling for most muggles, to suddenly learn that there was an entire hidden world full of people that seemed to have stepped out of either a fairy tale or a fantasy novel - or sometimes, a horror movie, depending on their biases.

Severus, on one of his days off, testified as well, standing grim and tight-fisted before the Wizengamot as he detailed how the man he long thought his father routinely beat both his late mother and himself simply because they were born with magic. There had been other factors of course, but even discussion of magic in front of Tobias Snape had always been like waving a red flag in front of a bull. If the Wizengamot would allow the list of names to be viewed by an authorized department or at least a section of the DMLE, then those families could be watched, those children protected from both outside attack and abuse in the home.

Arguments both for and against the formation of a task-force went on for weeks. James, never terribly patient when it came to protecting others, paced and ranted at length about the idiocy of

centenarians. Severus could well understand James' frustration, and shared it, although not as vocally. Frank, who had taken over his grandfather's seat, was also a staunch ally, as was the proxy for the Bones seat, Regent Lord Alan Bones, who held the seat for his young niece, Susan.

In early October, Amounderness was attacked. The wards there had been reinforced by Severus, by Remus, by all their friends really, even by Lord Black. Over top of all those wixen-set wards and the blood bound generational wards, Frank had paid to have the goblins raise wartime wards as well, since location disguising spells such as the Unplottable Charm and the *Fidelus* weren't compatible with the existing ward scheme. The multiplicity was what saved them, as the attacking Death Eaters couldn't get through the goblin wards, which were different enough from wixen-set wards that few could counter them. As a trained member of SaRACo., Severus or James might have been able to expose a weakness in goblin wards, but thankfully none of the Death Eaters had that training.

When the wards at Amounderness alerted, Severus and James both jerked awake in their beds at Stormholme, swearing vociferously. Severus began dressing in dragonhide and duelling robes immediately, having got back in the routine of late night calls. James was slower, having gotten out of that same routine. He stumbled sleepily about, rummaging one-handed for his dragonhide trousers and duelling robes before Severus stilled him gently with a hand on the shoulder.

"One of us needs to stay here," Severus said firmly, and James' face fell, his hazel eyes falling to his new prosthetic where it lay on the bedside table. "That's not it, and you know it," Severus chided, because he'd made sure that James saw the best prosthetist that St. Panteleimon's could recommend, and they did exercises together nearly every morning that had been specially designed by a healer specializing in such things so that James' arm would remain strong and mobile.

"But one of us needs to be here, and while yes, I might get drawn into the fight, I go as a healer," Severus reassured. James hesitated, but nodded, and with a grim nod in return, Severus swirled his Healer-green cloak around his shoulders, then double checked his pockets for wand, backup wand, knife, potions, portkeys, and notebook.

"I'll call it in," James said muzzily. "Come home safe."

"Always," Severus promised, leaning in to kiss James gently, then pulling up his sterile Healers mask and striding to the hearth. A moment later he was gone, and James scrubbed his hand over his face tiredly. Rising, he went to the hearth himself.

"Edinburgh Aurory," James called, tossing a pinch of floo powder into the fire, and the flames flared green as the connection activated.

"Edinburgh Aurory, state your trouble," the on duty Auror said crisply, a hint of brogue showing through.

"James Prince-Potter, I'm a wardholder for Amounderness House, Lancashire. The Longbottom Estate is under attack. My bondmate, Severus Prince-Potter of St. Pant.'s Forward Triage Unit and SaRACo. is already there. Houses Black and Bones may be responding with defenders as well," James said in rapid, clear speech.

"Aurors will be dispatched immediately, thank you for the alert," the Auror responded, and James was nearly thrown out of the fireplace the connection broke so fast. Despite the ringing headache that rapid disconnect spawned, James was glad that the call was taken in such serious and competent fashion. The war had been going on long enough that Aurors were beginning to get fatigued and apathetic, and it was no secret that some even quietly supported the Dark Lord. But unless someone was branded with the infamous Dark Mark, or caught in the act, it was very

difficult to prove anything.

Knowing he wouldn't sleep until Severus returned, James finished dressing and carefully attached his prosthetic. He had jokingly told Severus he'd be fine with a hook, like a pirate, which had earned him quite the adorable glare from his husband. The prosthetist had done a remarkable job though, and while the prosthetic hand couldn't relay touch properly, nor conduct magic into James' wand, it allowed him to pick up and grasp small and delicate objects, hug his mother, or lift his children with both arms.

Carefully James fitted his residual arm into the socket, then not quite deftly lifted his wand in his left hand. In truth, learning how to cast left handed was one of the harder parts of James' physical recovery, and it was something he was still working on. He had become proficient at the spells to attach his prosthetic arm and link it into his nervous system though, and could do them silently and almost without thought.

In truth, caring for Hadrian and Cordelia was the best therapy James could have envisioned. The children were always giving him new challenges and obstacles, and they didn't have any frame of reference by which to judge him. They didn't care if it took him a few tries to conjure bubbles out of his wand, just that they eventually got bubbles. With a rueful smile, James holstered his wand, then went to tap quietly at Alina's door, then his mother's. Once they were aware of the situation, James settled into the rocking chair in the nursery, listening to his children sleep.

Dawn was beginning to pink in the eastern sky when James felt the warmth of Severus' return through the wards. He smiled tiredly, rising and heading downstairs. Severus met him in the hallway, and they kissed warmly in relieved greeting. Curling Severus under his arm, James led his husband to their favorite sitting room. An elf sent up tea without being asked, and James settled on their favorite sofa, tapping his wand against the pot to encourage it to pour out two cups.

"How bad?" James asked sleepily when they'd each taken a few swallows of tea.

"The wards held," Severus replied. "Long term, everyone's fine. Frank took a round of *cruciatus* from Bellatrix, but he has plenty of Alice's marijuana to self medicate, and he knows how to handle it," Severus said, not so much unconcerned as aware that as an Auror, Frank knew how to handle his own pain management. "Aurors got there pretty quick. They were able to subdue Thorfinn Rowle, Raleigh Selwyn, and Max Mulciber, but the others escaped. House Black responded; Remus, Uncle Alphard and old Pollux."

"Not Sirius?" James asked, a bit of heat entering his tone.

"It sounded like he was on duty in London tonight," Severus said with a shrug, not too upset to have missed his old adversary. James sighed, the tension receding from his shoulders. "Lady Callidora and Uncle Harfang were in the thick of it too, I'd say of the lot Pollux and Harfang took the worst of it on our side, but they'll be fine with some rest. They're too old for this sort of thing, but too stubborn to give it up." James snorted at that. "Yes, I'm aware we both have that same trait," Severus said fondly, leaning into James and then kissing his stubbled brown cheek. James smiled fondly at that, snuggling Severus close against his side.

"Bed?" James murmured sleepily against Severus' head, and Severus let out a long-suffering sigh even as he smiled against James' throat.

"Bed," Severus agreed, and stood. They walked back up, looking in on the children before tumbling into bed. James tugged off his prosthesis and put it back on the bedside table, pulling Severus down on top of himself. Severus raised a single eyebrow, and James grinned broadly. Severus rolled his eyes and shook his head as James added eagerly waggling eyebrows to his

ridiculous entreating expression.

Leaning down, Severus kissed James thoroughly, their tongues twining slickly together. James let out a low growl, his large hand cupping and kneading Severus' buttock. Pulling away with a soft, fond look, Severus mouthed at James' stubbled jaw, then kissed over the scars on his face before slowly kissing and sucking his way down the vulnerable arch of James' throat. James lolled his head back obligingly, groaning deeply as Severus gently worried at his adam's apple with teeth and tongue.

"What do you want?" Severus murmured against the spit slicked skin of James' throat, licking into the hollow between his collarbones and then sucking the thin, sweat dampened skin there until the blood gathered beneath in a purplish bruise. James moaned inarticulately, and Severus flashed his teeth, then bit one of James' puckered brown nipples, earning a sharp noise of pleasure. "Tell me what you want," Severus demanded, then laved over the hurt while he pinched the other nipple between his fingers.

"Ride me," James directed huskily. "Turn around so I can watch you open yourself up, then ride me." Severus moaned, then smiled wickedly, leaning up to grab the lube. He turned, tossing his long hair so it fell in a silken black curtain around his shoulders. In the dim light of early morning, Severus' golden brown skin was limned in watery blues and pale lilacs, and James was sure, as he was every time he saw Severus like this, that he had married some beautiful fey creature from another world. "So beautiful," James admired, reaching up to knead Severus' buttocks again, spread him open.

Severus looked back over his shoulder, his eyes both soft with affection and glittering with lust. He rubbed a slicked finger over his anus, then slowly began to open himself. They had sex regularly enough that Severus didn't need extensive prep, but he never felt so admired, so loved, as when James was watching him like this, eyes blown wide with desire. So he put on a show, until James was panting and vibrating beneath him, and his own control was stretched to the thinnest of threads.

"Merlin, fuck, Severus, please," James finally begged, and with a moan of both pleasure and relief, Severus sank down over James. Severus' lithely muscled legs gathered under him, and he leaned forward slightly both for the pleasureable angle and because he knew it would give James a better show. Bracing his hands on James' knobby brown knees, Severus slowly began to undulate his hips.

"Stars but you feel good," James panted, shifting so he held Severus' hip, guiding him. He shifted slightly on the bed, gathering his own legs in so he could thrust up into Severus' welcoming heat. "Like that," James gasped as Severus settled into a slow, deep rhythm. "So tight sweetheart, so good." Severus keened as the shift allowed James' cock to stroke across his prostate, the praise filling the hidden little places inside. "So beautiful Very," James groaned, his hand sweeping up and down Severus' back, pulling one of his buttocks wide to expose him, then rubbing back up his spine to push him a little further forward. "Go on and ride me sweetheart, show me how good it feels."

"So good," Severus gasped, and then his rhythm faltered and broke. He needed more. He moaned, shifting so every stroke would hit his gland, then began to pound himself down on James in earnest.

"Yessss," James hissed, bucking up. He touched every bit of Severus he could reach, rolling his hips up in counterpoint to Severus' thrusts. Severus keened, high and needy, and James slipped his hand around, fondling Severus' cock and balls, then pressing against his perineum so his prostate

was stimulated from two directions. With a howl of pleasure, Severus came, grinding back against James' hips. James groaned deeply, thrusting up a few more times into Severus' clenching anus before he was coming as well.

James lay there hazily for a few moments, knowing he had an idiotic grin stretched across his face as he gently rubbed Severus' hip. With a shimmy and a soft mewl of loss, Severus disengaged, then flopped gracelessly at James' side. Sleepily, Severus fumbled for his wand, then waved it over both of them to get rid of the worst of the mess. James snuggled his husband up close to him, nuzzling into Severus' hair as he pulled up the covers and let sleep take him.

Severus woke a few hours later when his alarm went off, and groaned into James' chest. Still. There was work to be done. This was the worst part, he mentally grouched as he rose and dressed, about getting involved with Gryffindors. Their penchant for going off to save the world was apparently contagious. Lily would claim Severus was simply missorted, at which Severus would roll his eyes, but secretly wonder. It was no secret that while driven, ambition alone hadn't been enough for Severus to feel at home in Slytherin, where he was constantly mocked for his blood purity (or lack thereof), poverty, and loyalty to Lily.

Dressing, Severus kissed James, and got a sleepy good bye in turn, then showed himself from their suite. He looked in on the children, nuzzling against their warm, milk scented brown skin and murmuring quiet prayers of protection and safety. Quietly he went down to the kitchens, thanking Mipsy when she floated over a bowl of oatmeal well studded with raisins and sweetened with honey. He finished off a large mug of tea, and then he was off, back to St. Panteleimon's.

"Momma's home," Severus heard as he returned in the early evening, and he smiled tiredly. Shrugging out of his Healer's green cloak in the receiving room, he called an elf to take his work things and put them up. Heading into their favorite parlour, Severus found James with Hadrian and Cordelia. Hadrian clapped happily, grinning gummily at his bearer and showing his row of sharp little milk teeth.

"Hello baby," Severus murmured, reaching down to lift Hadrian onto the curve of his hip. Hadrian squealed happily, and made the appropriate wet noises when Severus nuzzled against his chubby brown cheek. Gently Severus carded his fingers through his son's downy black curls, sitting gracefully near where James lay stretched out. Cordelia lay on a blanket between them, wriggling on her tummy and trying to grab for a soft toy that James had enchanted to evade her grasp.

"Welcome home," James said with a fond smile.

"Ugh," Severus responded, wrinkling his long, aquiline nose as Hadrian managed to get hold of his thick plait and tug on it, then begin chewing on it. "Hadrian sweetheart, momma is not a chewtoy," Severus reminded, trying to gently extract his hair. Hadrian just looked up at him innocently with those Prince-purple eyes, continuing to gnaw on the thick braid. "You're lucky momma uses edible hair products, imp," Severus sighed, then laid down, cradling Hadrian with him. Knowing this game well, Hadrian crawled up Severus torso to pat at his thin cheeks, then press wet kisses to Severus' face.

"Ugh, yes, you're very sweet Harry," Severus said, then blew a raspberry on Hadrian's pudgy chin. Hadrian squealed happily, and they traded kisses for raspberries for a little while until Hadrian's minute attention span wavered. James watched them fondly, amused by the exaggerated expressions Severus pulled to tease their firstborn. While he had missed the action of the Aurory at first, James knew that if his arm could be regrown in the morning, and his badge number reactivated, he'd likely turn them down to spend his days spoiling his kids.

"Masters and Little Master and Mistress, dinner is being served," an elf piped around six, and

James rose with Cordelia in his arm. She fussed a bit, being generally fussy and more so when she was hungry. She was nearly six months old though, and had begun taking soft, bland solids. The wet nurse's contract had run out at the beginning of October, and they'd felt confident enough between milk substitutes and the introduction of solids not to renew.

Settling at the table, Severus greeted Alina and Leonora, casting his eye carefully over Mother Potter. Leonora was getting frailer almost by the day, and while James and Severus hadn't spoken about it recently, Severus doubted she would survive the winter. Conversation over supper was desultory, neither Alina nor Leonora having any new gossip from their correspondents, and Severus not wanting to discuss work at the table.

After supper, Severus and James ran the bedtime routine with Hadrian and Cordelia, bathing them and putting them into nightclothes. James read a story, one about dragons this evening, and Severus sang them a quiet Indonesian lullaby he'd learned from some of his Indo-Dutch cousins when he was traveling the summer after Hogwarts. Thankfully, they dropped off without too much fuss, and James and Severus could sink together into one of the sofas with a bit of tea, Severus deftly rolling a cigarette of Longbottom leaf for James' evening dose.

"Ugh," Severus said after a while, and stole James' marijuana cigarette to take a deep drag of the potent herb. James huffed softly in amusement.

"That's the third time you've said that tonight," James pointed out unnecessarily, stealing his joint back. With a small, grumpy sound, Severus buried his face in James' muscular chest, inhaling the familiar scent of him, although the herbal, smoky odor of the Longbottom Leaf and some baby scents clung to his clothing, dusting powder and something fruity.

"Did the kids behave today?" Severus asked after a while, his voice muffled in James' shirt.

"They were fine, Harry's babbling more and more, afraid he takes after me there," James said, and Severus could tell without looking up that his husband was smiling fondly. The tension had eased from James' body as he smoked, the herb mitigating the phantom pains. "Some of it is sounding more like real words too. I mean, he's had momma and daddy down for a while now, but I think he's about got Lily and Moony's names down, although he seems happy enough calling Antares 'An,' and Alina 'Een,' although I think he's nearly got 'Gram' down as well." Severus smiled at that. Hadrian had been babbling pretty well when Severus went back to work, but he did miss these little day to day developments.

"And Cordelia?" Severus prompted.

"She babbles back at Harry, but it's all nonsense at the moment. I think he might understand her though," James teased with a laugh. "Or at least he seems to. She's getting more consistent at recognizing people she knows, and smiling at them. Although she gave Sirius a huge grin the other day, but it was only because she pooped." Severus snickered quietly at that.

"Clever girl," Severus complimented, and James chuckled softly.

"Told you they'd take after their momma," James said smugly, stroking his hand soothingly down Severus' back. They rested quietly together for a while longer, letting their bond revel in their physical closeness. During the day, they both kept their connection closed, not wanting to distract one another if something attention demanding came up. "How was work?" James asked after a time, and Severus tensed, then sighed as James began to rub more insistently at his back and shoulders.

"No attacks, or at least none I was called out for," Severus said. "So that's a good thing. I didn't



get any research done though. We run through all the standard healing potions so quickly that all qualified brewers are working on stocks almost constantly.” James made a soft sound of understanding and commiseration, shifting his hold so he could knead Severus’ shoulders with a little more strength, leaving his handleless arm looped around Severus’ waist. “In a way the tedium is lovely, as it means that no one’s dying, but on the other hand - it’s tedious.” James snorted softly at that, but nodded his understanding. “Your day?” he asked in return.

“The usual,” James said with a shrug. “Read the Wizengamot circular and did some business stuff while the kids were amusing themselves, but mostly played with them. I sat with mum when they were napping - she’s really not doing so good, though I’m sure you’ve noticed that.” Severus nodded. “She thought I was dad today, was kind of awkward.”

“She’s not a young lady, even by wizarding standards,” Severus said, trying to be reassuring and not sure how well it worked.

“I know,” James sighed. “I’ve tried to talk to her a bit, tell her it’s okay to go, that we’ll miss her but her job here is done, but - I’m honestly not sure how much she understands anymore.” Severus had nothing he could say to that. He just held onto James, and hoped that was enough. James sighed, nuzzling down into Severus’ soft hair and inhaling deeply, smelling the sandalwood and citrus scented oils Severus used to dress his hair. “Let’s go up to bed baby, you’re exhausted,” James murmured, and Severus nodded, but didn’t move.

With an amused huff, James stood, carefully lifting Severus with him. Severus murmured sleepy nonsense, and James shifted his hold carefully, then carried Severus up to bed. In the morning, they both woke at their usual times and went through their usual routines. Severus helped James into his prosthetic as they dressed, and after breakfast, they did the exercises for James’ arm. Then Severus was off to work, and James was up to wake the children and begin their day.

The rest of October passed fairly quietly, although there were a few more kidnappings or disappearances that SaRACo. was called on to investigate. Every time they diagrammed a forcefully entered home or spoke to someone’s terrified relatives, Severus ached. Their attempts to protect the muggleborn and halfblood wixen living in more muggle residential areas had come to nothing despite James’ tireless efforts, and the futility was disheartening at best. The lack of support from Dumbledore was particularly infuriating to Severus. The Dark happily campaigned against Dumbledore as a ‘muggle lover’ and ‘champion of muggles and mudbloods,’ but when the muggleborn actually needed him, the aged wizard was missing in action.

Thankfully for Severus’ mental health, he was able to accomplish some advancements in his anti-transformation potion. He was fairly certain that even if it didn’t prevent the transformation in werewolves, it was an improvement over Belby’s original Wolfsbane, which while it helped a werewolf keep their mind, didn’t do anything to mitigate pain, and was rather cumbersome and expensive to brew. Focus on research, experimentation, and brewing didn’t keep Severus from noticing that there were more rumours than ever circulating though. Everyone seemed to be of the opinion that the Dark Lord was planning something big, and given the earlier attack on the Longbottom’s estate, and the clear campaign against magical children born in late July, Severus couldn’t help but feel he knew what that something was.

Late on the 31 of October as Severus prepared the Samhain Eve ritual with Alina, the wards screamed as they came under attack. As at Amounderness, the Stormholme wards had been cast thick and strong, enforced with generations of Prince blood and runic magic. With a jab of his wand, Severus produced his *patronus*. The doe flicked her silvery ears, awaiting direction, and Severus quickly relayed a message to House Black. By his side, James performed the same motions, then sent his gleaming stag to Amounderness for reinforcements from House

Longbottom.

“You need to hold the wards, but I can’t go out to meet them either,” James admitted grimly as Alina re-entered the room with the children in her arms and Leonora following behind her. He knew that his left handed casting wasn’t good enough to duel Death Eaters and survive, but as the wards were blood bound to the Prince family, James couldn’t manipulate them as strongly as Severus.

“Auntie, Mother Potter, we need to get to the hearthstone,” Severus instructed. “Jamie - I - lay traps?” he suggested, his mind racing. They hadn’t reworked their household defense plan since James had lost his arm, which was idiotic in retrospect. “In case they break through the wards?” James nodded. He was fairly certain he could quickly rework some of the old pranking spells to have more dangerous - possibly lethal - consequences.

“I’ll be back soon,” James promised, kissing Severus deeply, and then they split apart. As Severus raced down into the lower levels of the manor, he felt the floo wards register Remus’ magical signature. Offering up a silent prayer to the Blessed ancestors, Severus slit his palm and laid his hand on the hearthstone, interfacing directly with the magicks that protected their home. He’d gained strength and finesse since his first defense of Stormholme, and modified and modulated the wards accordingly.

For nearly half an hour, Severus held the wards. He could feel the arrival of their friends to defend them. He felt the arrival of others as well, although no one he recognized. And then there was a surge in the wards. A terrific wave of malignancy, and Severus cried out sharply, throwing his will against the attacker. Everything he was, he channelled into the wards. But the malevolent energy was too much. It shattered through the rune matrix and overwhelmed Severus, knocking him out entirely.

Above, James paused as he felt the wards go into cascading failure. The last time he’d felt anything similar, it had been when Hartsfield was overrun and their families massacred. Terror gripping his heart, James looked longingly toward the hidden wardroom entrance, then raced for the front door. If the wards were down, there was nothing he could do to get them back up to any useful degree in the limited time available. He reached through his bond with Severus, felt that his husband was well enough, although likely suffering from some unpleasant magical backlash from having been interfaced with the wards when they fell.

Severus’ presence, still but warm in the back of his psyche, spurred James on. He cast hasty makeshift wards as he went, twisting in as many traps and cantrips as possible. Exiting the old wardline, James threw himself into the fray. He cast and dodged, ducked and cursed, the magic coming easily in his heartfelt defense despite that he was casting left handed. He didn’t always get the motions perfect, but his powerful intent was enough.

As the battle progressed, James saw why the wards had fallen. Unlike the earlier attack on Amounderness or the previous attack on Stormholme, or even the slaughter at Hartsfield, the Dark Lord himself had come. A chill swept through James, and he reframed his mindset. He’d been fighting nearly all out from the start, but there could be no holds barred if Voldemort himself had entered the fray. Those who stood against the Dark Lord did not often remain standing for long.

James stumbled slightly as Severus’ presence in the back of his mind strengthened. They generally kept themselves separate, especially in combat situations where sharing emotion could be an impediment. Although James wasn’t as powerful an occlumens as Severus, he had trained in both that art and Leglimancy, and so he reached out tentatively with part of his mind, even as he fought on. Severus’ mind welcomed his, and then power was seeping into James.

Gasping sharply, James twisted his wand and threw a vicious curse at a Death Eater. His and Severus' magic was combining, and moreover, Severus was also drawing up and feeding James the power of the lands that had belonged to the Princes for millennia. While power-sharing was spoken of between magically compatible spouses, the practice was usually treated as myth rather than fact. James had long known that the connection between himself and Severus was exceptionally strong due to their compatibility, that was why they kept it blocked off. But he had never imagined they might actually share their power.

The ancient magics flowed through James, and distantly he thought he could feel the power of his family's ancestral spirits as well. He put everything he was into his casting, and soon, the Death Eaters were fleeing James, falling back to duel others they thought themselves more capable of defeating. Power crackled around James, the might of generations of Princes and Potters sparking in his blood. Even the Dark Lord was loathe to face this James Prince-Potter, who was doing a good impression of an Avatar of Protection.

Voldemort retreated a step, then two, tripping over his trailing robes in his haste, and then disappearing with a hiss of displaced air. The Aurors cast strong and fast, attempting to capture the remaining Death Eaters before they too disappeared in flares of shadow and brimstone. His enemy gone, the power dissipated from around James, and he staggered, then collapsed to his knees. A strong shoulder nudged up under James' good arm, and his head lolled weakly as he looked to his left.

"Alright mate?" Remus asked, tawny eyes alight with worry.

"Alright," James slurred out, feeling slightly drunk on the amount of power that had been channelled through him.

"What was that?" Frank Longbottom asked, shouldering under James' other side.

"Samhain," James murmured. "Felt Severus through the bond, stronger than ever, 'cept maybe the marriage night. Felt the land and our families and all the Blessed ancestors," James said, his voice fading in and out. "Merlin, what a rush." Remus laughed softly at that, casting his *patronus*. It took the shape of a rather mischievous looking red fox, and James was distantly aware he knew someone else with a similar *patronus*, although he was too knackered to remember who.

"Threat averted, could use a Healer," Remus relayed, then sent the fox darting off, directed to Lily Evans-Black, Grimsthorpe Castle.

"Alright?" came a familiar voice, and James squinted tiredly up at Sirius, who was in his crimson and dragonhide Auror uniform, dirt streaked and slightly singed about the edges.

"Urgh," James managed, then pitched forward and sicked up on both their shoes. "Oh, there's the hangover," he slurred, and then moaned, pressure spiking in his head. "Want Very."

"I know mate," Frank commiserated with an amused smile. "I'll go find him and the kids, alright?" James didn't bother nodding, certain that if he moved his head, it would roll right off his shoulders. Frank, Remus and Sirius awkwardly shifted James' slumping form, until James was settled on the ground, Remus and Sirius on either side of him to keep him upright. Frank sent a *patronus* to his own wife, then turned toward the manor house. A weak grasp on his sleeve stopped him short.

"Traps," James mumbled when Frank leaned down close to him, and Frank looked questioningly at Sirius and Remus, who both grimaced.

"James' pretty inventive with traps," Sirius admitted, and Remus nodded.

“I’ll go with you,” Remus said, gently pushing James over to lean wholly on Sirius. “Knowing James, he upped the level of intensity from ‘amusing prank spells’ to ‘dismemberment and death,’” Remus said with a slight smile. Frank grimaced but nodded, and together they headed into the house. Although neither knew exactly where the wardroom was, the trail of lethal traps James had put up was fairly easy to follow. They were not, however, easy to disarm.

Remus and Frank were still working their way through James’ traps when Severus and Alina stepped out of an unmarked door in front of them. All four startled, Alina raising her wand instantly, and Severus following more lethargically. Recognizing each other, they paused, scrutinizing each other carefully.

“What’s my nickname and why?” Remus asked after a moment.

“Moony, werewolf,” Severus murmured, blinking at them sleepily. “James?”

“Seems to have channelled a bit too much power, he’s outside,” Frank said, leaving aside that Severus looked just as magically exhausted. “Aunt Leonora and the kids?”

“Leonora passed around midnight,” Alina said quietly. “I felt the energies change shortly after that, and the spirits moved in Severus. When Severus told me it was safe, I had the elves take the children to the nursery, and Leonora’s body to the best parlour. I know her familial traditions are more Norse, but Severus suggested we sit the *novendialis* for her here, although we will of course consult James as to his wishes.”

“The *novendialis* is a worthy tradition,” Frank said, speaking as a member of House Longbottom, Leonora’s family of birth. “I will speak to Uncle Harfang about the other Longbottom traditions, should James wish to use them. I’m unsure what the Potter family rites entailed.” Alina nodded, shifting her hold on Severus slightly. Severus let out a soft sound of protest, but roused slightly.

“Pepper-up,” Severus directed muzzily, and Remus opened the padded potions pouch at his own belt, producing a vial of the requested variety that Severus himself had brewed.

“Here you are Severus,” Remus said, fighting back his relieved amusement. Part of his euphoria, Remus knew, was leftover adrenaline from the fight, but he did find a sleepy Severus to be rather adorably amusing. Severus drank the potion down, and perked up shortly, blinking the sleep from his dark eyes as steam poured out his ears.

“Bless,” Severus gasped, blinking repeatedly as his eyes watered.

“James is pretty out of it, he’s asking for you,” Frank said. “I ran the basic first aid check, and he came up fine, save for some magical backlash and exhaustion.” Severus nodded, visibly gathering his strength.

“Babies?” Severus double checked with Alina.

“In the nursery,” Alina reassured. “I’ll go straight up. Remus, if you wouldn’t mind walking with me in case James booby-trapped the route?” Remus nodded, and Severus looked up at Frank, steeling himself for what he might find outside.

“Let’s go check on James,” Frank said understandingly, and they retraced Remus and Frank’s steps back out of the house. Severus was soon knelt in front of James, casting a multitude of diagnostics.

“He’ll be fine,” Severus finally declared. “Like you said, backlash and exhaustion. I can pour some potions into him, but frankly, they won’t do much since he’s pretty much emptied his reserves and they won’t have much to work with. What he really needs is some sleep.”

“Alright,” Sirius said, looking around. Aurors were still roaming about, taking readings and talking to one another. There were a few others present as well, off duty Aurors who had heard about the attack and come to help one of their own. No Albus Dumbledore though, no Order of the Phoenix, not that Sirius was too surprised. As he and James had repaired their friendship, James had begun telling him their reasons for not wholly trusting Dumbledore.

“When Amounderness was attacked, did Dumbledore come?” Sirius asked, tilting his head up to look at Frank. Frank shook his head.

“Nope. It was Severus, Remus, Uncles Harfang and Pollux, Aunts Cass and Calli, mom and dad, me and Alice, and a few of the lads from the Aurory after James put out the call,” Frank listed off. “Seems odd to me too, that he isn’t protecting his potential saviour any better.”

“Unless he’s expecting a sacrificial death,” Severus bit out, his anger clear even with his lack of energy.

“There is that,” Frank grimaced. “Bloody awful if it’s true though. Don’t know I could ever follow a man like that, though I think Vance and Jones from your old squad have joined up with him.”

“And here I liked Jones,” Severus said with a wry quirk of his thin mouth. He turned from Frank, leaning into James and cupping his cheek. James blearily squinted one eye open, then groaned and closed it again. “Alright boys, let’s get his lordship up to bed,” Severus said with a shake of the head. “Black, if you don’t mind telling the commander we’ll be in to make a statement when we can, but not to expect us before day after tomorrow at earliest?”

“On it,” Sirius promised, rather pleased to be trusted with even that slight responsibility by Severus. “Let me know when the funeral and such is for Mother Potter.” Severus nodded, and led Frank and Sirius, who were mostly carrying James, up to the master suite. They heaved James’ loose limbed form into the bed, Sirius choking on his laughter, and then showed themselves out. Frank was among the last to leave, and after the Aurors were gone, he remained, putting up temporary wards to keep the Prince-Potter family safe as they slept.

The sun was just creeping over the horizon on the first of November when a small, grey, rat with an advanced case of mange slipped onto the property. It scurried across the broad green lawn of the manor house, then through the grate of an air vent in the cellars. The rat nosed this way and that, scurrying finally into the quiet nursery where Hadrian and Cordelia slept. In a twisting and shifting of magic, the rat became a man. He was small, with straw-blond hair, and a face that still had a distinct resemblance to a less than adorable member of the order *rodentia*.

With a nervous twitch of his nose, this wizard, known to most at Peter Pettigrew, and a few as Wormtail, rolled up his left sleeve. The Dark Mark twisted ominous and black on Peter’s forearm, and with a trembling hand, he pressed his wand tip to the magical brand. There was no incantation necessary. The spark between wand and Mark was enough. With a terrific *CRACK!* and a deepening of shadows, the Dark Lord stood within the walls of Stormholme.

Even the quickly laid wards Frank had hurriedly raised could detect this ill-intentioned intrusion, and they shrilled ominously. James and Severus stirred sluggishly in their room, struggling to wake from their exhausted slumber. Alina, still red eyed from her earlier tears, jolted into her robes and grabbed her wand. She twisted on her heel, instincts shrieking, and apparated straight into the vivid green wash of Voldemort’s *Avada Kedavra*.

In his room, Severus jerked from his bed as the shrill of the wards became more insistent, followed a half second later by James. They apparated one breath after the other, James not bothering to grab anything but his wand. Severus raised the green shield of a battlefield Healer as he landed in the

nursery, stumbling over Alina's too still body. An instant later James was at his side, and James' conjured steel partition melted in another flash of lethal green.

"Fuck," James breathed, and then he and Severus were fighting for their lives, for their children's lives. In the small nursery, there was little room to move between the cot, the bassinet, the changing table and dresser, the pile of soft toys and toy chest. But James and Severus had the advantage of fighting on their home terrain, which meant they knew the local hazards. What none of them accounted for was the heavy presence of the ancestor spirits that had been called forth at dusk for the usual vigil but never dispersed, and among them was one very angry grandmother.

"Blessed ancestors," Severus started under his breath, and then gasped as the weight of those generations of spirits, angry and defensive of their home place and bloodline, actually answered his call. "Protect my husband, protect my children," he gasped out, and poured his power into his wand. "*Mortem bonem*," Severus incanted breathlessly, using for the first time the assisted suicide spell he'd been taught in Healer's College. It was no less lethal, no less painless than the Unforgivable killing curse, but it was also quite legal, at least if performed at the express request of the person being cast upon, and therefore not classified as Dark magic. Brilliant white light seared across the retinas of everyone in the room, and with a soft *thud* the body of the Dark Lord fell to the floor.

A shadowy form screamed up from the corpse as Voldemort's body began to disintegrate, leaving only ragged robes and a pale yew wand behind. Silvery bright spirits whirled out of the aether, caging the wraith. Severus panted, eyes wide and wand still raised as he watched Alina's ghost and Leonora's and his mother's and generation upon generation of Princes and Potters by birth and marriage corral the Dark Lord's spirit. James stared as well, although his attention was diverted by the terrified squeak of Peter Pettigrew, who he promptly immobilized and bound.

"That's not normal is it?" James asked quietly, his wand trained on Pettigrew still, even as he stared awestruck at the whirling mass of combative spirits.

"If it is, they didn't warn us about this side effect of the euthanasia spell," Severus said shakily, his wand wavering slightly with both fear and exhaustion.

"I think we need Aurors," James said, and Severus nodded.

"Agreed," Severus murmured. The silvery spirits were slowly fading, dragging Voldemort's blackened soul with them back toward the thin Veil between worlds. "Thank all the gods it's Samhain day." James nodded as he silently conjured his *patronus*. Where earlier, his usual stag had formed, now appeared a larger form, still cervine, but with too intelligent eyes and a too human face, the antlers branching into what seemed like hundreds of skyward reaching points. A serpent coiled docilely around the stag's neck like a living torque, and a wreath of oak leaves rested in its branching antlers.

"We're adding Cernunnos to the altar, by the way," James said weakly, recognizing the avatar of the Forest Lord.

"Noted," Severus said with due awe, and then the *patronus* was bounding away to fetch the Aurors. "We're also having a really big thanksgiving for Mother Potter and Auntie." James nodded fervently. When Severus had first told him his mother was gone, James had mentally begun planning a small, quiet funeral to deny the aching loss in his chest. But her spirit had remained, had defended them, and James was still uncertain how to feel about that, or about Alina's selfless sacrifice.

"And first thing when we wake up, we're calling the goblins to put up wards," James said, and

Severus nodded his agreement as the last of the spirits finally faded away. Severus swayed on his feet, and James gently pushed him into the rocking chair, then bundled up Hadrian and deposited the still peacefully sleeping toddler in Severus' arms. Silent tears of relief trickled down Severus' cheeks as he cuddled his little boy close. Reaching into the bassinet, James picked up their little daughter, and the two of them held on until the Aurors came.

## Chapter End Notes

The lullaby Severus sings is a traditional Indonesian song called Suliram, which is one of my favorite lullabys. One of the more famous versions is by Miriam Makeba (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3-mXs1YzSM>).

James' 'Lord of the Forest' *patronus* is inspired by the deer god / forest spirit / night walker in Princess Mononoke, and also by depictions of the Celtic Horned God, called either (or both) Cernunnos and/or Herne.

I initially meant to get to horcruxes this chapter, but they didn't feel like cooperating. Voldemort was too damn persistent about getting at poor Harry.

# Soul of Eternity

## Chapter Notes

I introduce a few OCs in this chapter, but they're not important but secondary characters in the way that Mother Potter or Alina were.

Severus and James and their relationship aren't as central in this chapter, but I wanted to fix the rest of the wizarding world a bit so they'd have a nice place to live with their children. I ended up focusing on Lily a bit more, because she's an awesome character herself, and one I like playing with. Besides, Severus likes when his friends are happy.

Also, I talk a fair bit about government and politics in this chapter. I am an American. I do not really understand the parliamentary system as it exists in the UK. I do my research through wikipedia, and have neither a Brit-picker nor a beta reader. I ask humbly for your patience and suspension of disbelief on this matter, because frankly I can't be arsed to research beyond wikipedia.

Hat tip to Baelorfan, who reminded me in a comment on Chapter 08 that I hadn't mentioned little Antares for a while, and to Lizzybeth74, who enquired after Wormtail's fate, which I had also forgotten to consider.

Now, after that egregiously long note, on with the show.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"I know why the mad bastard didn't leave a proper corpse," Sirius announced as he stumbled into the parlour at Stormholme, still sooty from his trip through the floo. Aloft, he held a large and rather gaudy golden locket, with a serpentine design picked out in emeralds on the front cover. Severus and James traded quizzical looks, then looked back to Sirius. "Horcruxes," Sirius said proudly, then huffed when James just looked perplexed and Severus hitched his already raised eyebrow up another notch.

"You know I'm fixing up old number twelve, yeah?" Sirius prodded, flopping onto the sofa and tossing the locket onto the coffee table. Severus and James nodded. Now that he'd partially reconciled with his family, Sirius had been invited to remain with the Family Black at Grimsthorpe. Sirius though, had known that he and his relatives would shortly drive one another to distraction if they co-habitated, and so he instead asked to take possession of his boyhood home at number 12 Grimmauld Place in London. It was larger and more secure than the flat he currently rented, and given he was a fairly well known Auror, it made sense to take precautions, especially in the current climate.

"Well, I was going through Reg's things, poor sod, and our mad old elf, Kreacher comes and starts screeching at me," Sirius explained. "I about hexed the bugger before I managed to make sense of it. It seems ol' snakeface made a horcrux, which makes him functionally immortal. Even if he took a killing curse to the face, they could resurrect him, because a horcrux is a little piece of his soul torn off and kept outside the body.

"Not long before Reg died, Moldysorts used Kreacher to hide a horcrux, this horcrux. But the bugger was under orders to come home to Reg, so Reg got the story out of him, and went to get the



horcrux, sent it off with Kreacher and was killed for his trouble. But Kreacher hasn't been able to destroy it. So that's why the bastard is so hard to kill!" Sirius exclaimed excitedly.

"You're saying you just flooded into our house carrying a piece of Moldyshorts' soul?!" James exclaimed, leaping up with wand drawn. Severus rose more slowly, wand in hand but down by his side, watchful and wary.

"Er - yes?" Sirius said, clearly beginning to understand that maybe that hadn't been the best idea.

"And what if his spirit can feel or know somehow where it is?" James demanded, and Sirius shrugged.

"He'd have demolished the townhouse already if he knew it was there, instead of wherever it was hidden before Reg went to get it," Sirius pointed out. "Reg died in '79, so it's been sitting there collecting dust for the last two years without him taking notice."

"Do you know how to destroy it?" Severus asked, his voice low and quiet. Sirius grimaced at that.

"Er, no," Sirius admitted. "But I did find the book that Reg was using to look them up in," he added hopefully, and produced a copy of *Magick Most Evile* from inside his robes. "Had a time getting that out of the wards, let me tell you, and it barely even mentions horcruxes." Severus narrowed his eyes. He was fairly certain that the Prince library held a copy of the same book.

"I'll check our library here," Severus volunteered, sheathing his wand. "Jamie, keep an eye on your idiot friend and his piece of the Dark Lord's soul." James grimaced, as did Sirius, but both nodded as Severus swept from the room. Severus' strides lengthened and quickened as he traversed the distance to Stormholme's massive library, and by the time he entered, he was nearly running. Thankfully, his ancestors had at some point organized the place extensively, including the magical descendant of a finding aid, much more efficient than a card catalogue.

"*Reperio* horcruxes," Severus stated firmly, tapping his wand against the library ledger. The pages fluttered and flipped, then fell open on the appropriate subject heading - Soul Magic. Severus grimaced again, then ran his finger down the page. *Magick Most Evile* was listed, along with four other books, one of which was in Archaic Latin, one in Demotic Egyptian, and the remaining two in hieratic Egyptian.

The Latin and Demotic works were translations from earlier works, one written in Egyptian hieroglyphs, *The Tomb Paintings and Funereal Offerings of King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Woseribre, the son of Re, Senebkay, also known as Seneb Kay*, and the other in Archaic Greek, titled *The Breeding of the Basilisk: A Memoir* by Herpo (the Foul). The two in hieratic Egyptian were *The Weighing of the Soul* and its sequel, *The Judgement of Maat*. Both were written by an Egyptian priest, and had been passed down in the Prince family for centuries.

"Oh, goody," Severus complained under his breath, but summoned the books nevertheless. He then ran a search for dictionaries, syllabaries, and so forth on hieratic and Demotic Egyptian, and the Archaic version of Latin, none which he'd before now had cause to study. Thankfully, there were resources for all the languages, although he left them shelved for the moment.

"I doubt the Hartsfield books would include anything on the topic, but it might be worth checking," Severus alerted Sirius and James as he re-entered the parlour. "Most of these are in Egyptian." Sirius and James both grimaced. Neither of them knew any languages beyond the standardised Classical Latin that was taught to all purebloods, nor were they as adept at languages as Severus had become.

“Do you think any of our friends would have more info?” James asked hopefully, and Severus cocked his head thoughtfully, setting the books in stacks on the coffee table, although not directly next to the cursed locket.

“Unlikely,” Severus admitted, seating himself next to James. “Maybe in the Black library - did you search for the term, or just find the one book?” he asked Sirius.

“The book was in Reg’s old room, I didn’t think to check the library,” Sirius admitted, his cheeks flushing in embarrassment. He had, perhaps, been a bit reckless. It was an exciting discovery though, and one he had been eager to share.

“Why don’t you, and take that - *thing* - with you,” Severus bit out sharply, his fear expressed as anger. Sirius bridled, but they had been around one another enough by now for Sirius to understand that it was Severus’ fear talking. Silently, Sirius stood, and stalked back out of the room with his copy of *Magick Most Evile* in one hand, and the locket in the other. Almost as soon as he was out of the room, Severus melted, curling in on himself and bringing up his trembling hands to cradle his face.

“Hey, hey,” James murmured, enfolding Severus in a gentle embrace. “It’s safe, we’re safe, everyone’s safe.”

“Why do I allow you to be friends with him,” Severus bemoaned, and James chortled softly.

“Because he makes me look smart,” James answered with a teasing grin, manhandling Severus so they both lay lengthwise on the sofa, Severus cradled against James’ chest. “We’ll figure it out Very, you know we will,” James promised more solemnly, the echo of an oath in his warm voice. “This is the first big break we’ve had in a while.” Severus sighed, scrubbing his hands over his face, then pushing them back into his long dark hair and mussing it thoroughly.

“I know,” Severus said tiredly. “I know this is a big deal. I just - I’m so ready for this war to be over, for our family to be safe.” James tightened his arms around Severus at that in silent agreement. It had only been a month since Severus had killed the Dark Lord, but the manner of death had left them more than a little suspicious. Even as the Aurors undertook an official inquest, Severus had spoken at length with Healers and medical experts on end of life care. All agreed that a visible wraith such as the one they had seen exiting the body of Voldemort was not at all usual, nor was the disintegration of the Dark Lord’s corpse. None of them in fact, had ever heard of such a thing.

After exhausting the knowledge of the medical experts at both St. Panteleimon’s and St. Mungo’s - which was very little on this topic - Severus had reached out to wixen specializing in curse-breaking. There had been slightly more information there, if only because there was any information at all. Such an after effect of the euthanasia spell was unheard of in the medical community. Which meant no one like Voldemort had ever before been subjected to the spell, otherwise such an effect would be documented and studied for the curiosity it was. They all knew that the Dark Lord had claimed to have undergone all sorts of arcane magical rituals, though, and the curse breakers had speculated that the wraith-like form was a result. It was no stretch to assume that some of those purported rites were intended to preserve Voldemort’s life in almost every conceivable situation.

The furore still hadn’t died down over the attack on Stormholme and the defeat of the Dark Lord. Severus had begun re-raising the generational wards and strengthening them, and arranged with the goblins for new wards of their making, then later had them add a mail redirecting ward on top of that. The number of owls turned away each morning was enormous. All their correspondence now went through Gringotts, where it was screened by curse-breakers and other specialists. Severus was

seriously hiring on a correspondence secretary on top of that.

While the Prince-Potters could barely leave their house during the war due to the dangers of being in the open, now that the war was technically over, they couldn't leave because they'd be swarmed by reporters, Dark Lord supporters, and well wishers. It was all rather overwhelming. James was glad every time they went out in public that he was a stay at home parent. He'd also gotten a lot better at passing as a muggle, taking the children out in the muggle world where they wouldn't be recognized and harassed. They especially seemed to like the zoo.

Thankfully, the Prince-Potters had been able to mourn Leonora and Alina privately, although not without some criticism from members of the public who felt they deserved a chance to view the bodies of the two women who had lead the ghostly charge against Voldemort's spirit. Severus was less than sympathetic to such demands. The entitlement of the magical population of Britain was a frequent topic of Severus' mutterings, which James mostly agreed with, and also found both amusing and adorable. Less amusing was that Severus was semi-seriously considering leaving his position at St. Panteleimon's because he was constantly being cornered in the halls by patients and their families who insisted on speaking with him while he was trying to work.

More than one emergency had been called in at the Edinburgh Aurory by someone that thought Severus would be on the response team, not understanding that he wasn't a member of the First Response Auror Corps, but rather the Search and Rescue Auror Corps and St. Panteleimon's Forward Triage Unit. He still deployed with the Forward Triage Unit, and thankfully most people didn't understand the differences in the various emergency response teams. All the same, the Aurory wasn't best pleased about the false alarms.

Despite that it had been weeks since the defeat of Voldemort though, SaRACo., the Search and Rescue Auror Corps, remained incredibly busy tracking down evasive Death Eaters. While the information that James had been passed by Lucius Malfoy had been useful during the actual war, it was even more helpful as they hunted down supporters of the toppled Dark Lord. Although Lucius came from a rich and politically powerful family, he hadn't been terribly highly placed in the ranks of the Death Eaters, as his discomfort with the more violent aspects had been clear to the Dark Lord.

Never, Lucius had confided to Severus, had Lucius been more thankful for his sheltered upbringing and weak stomach, and for his family's wealth and influence. During the war, that meant Lucius hadn't been included in the planning of attacks, nor had he often partaken in the violent raids and wild revels. While he had reportedly been seen at more than one raid, Lucius swore up, down, and sideways that he had gone only when refusal would have resulted in torture. For the most part though, Lucius had focused more on the soft power of bribery and blackmail. Now that Voldemort was vanquished, all Lucius' secretive connections were put to good use.

The more violent followers like the Lestranges were hunted down soon after the fall of the Dark Lord, although none had gone quietly. Bellatrix, the Lestrangle brothers, and Barty Crouch Jr. had attacked the Black seat of Grimsthorpe within hours of the Dark Lord's demise, and a few of the elders of the Black clan had paid with their lives. As Bellatrix was a Black of the blood, her husband had been added to the wards at the time of their marriage, and Barty was descended from the Black family within the past few generations, they had ready access to the property through the wards.

Thankfully, Remus and Sirius had still been present at Grimsthorpe, and Auror reinforcements had arrived quickly, although Barty and the Lestranges hadn't capitulated without a fight. In the end, Sirius ended up killing his cousin Bellatrix, and Barty Crouch Jr. was incapacitated by Remus, later dying in the Ministry's ward for injured prisoners. Rodolphus and Rabastan survived, but were

sentenced to the Dementors' Kiss when they testified under *veritaserum* to their many and varied crimes.

They had gone to Grimsthorpe, the Lestrangle brothers said, both seeking information about the Dark Lord, whose Mark had burned away on their forearms, and knowing that little Antares Black had been on a list of children Voldemort wished to destroy. Pettigrew had also been subjected to the Kiss, for his role in helping Voldemort find his way into Stormholme. The rat had begged for his life, had spilled every bit of meagre information he had. But it had been clear that he had joined the Death Eaters not long out of Hogwarts because he thought they would win, and he had never once looked back in regret.

It was the more subtle and secretive followers that Severus and SaRACo. were still hunting a month and more after the Dark Lord's downfall. Their most recent catch had been Igor Karkaroff, who had been schooled at Durmstang despite being born in England. Igor had made himself quite useful, attempting to lessen his sentence. The new head of the DMLE, Amelia Bones, had been intractable though. Despite his 'cooperation,' Karkaroff would spend the rest of his life isolated in the black cells of Azkaban. But he'd given them plenty more names to hunt down before he realized that he could not buy leniency from Bones and her dedicated Aurors.

The full extent of the Dark Lord's forces had been known only to the mad wizard himself. The masks the Death Eaters wore not only disguised them from victims and bystanders when they were committing their atrocities, they also protected the vicious and back-stabbing wine from being identified by one another. Most Death Eaters knew only a small number of their 'colleagues' by name, and many of those names were either fairly common given names, nicknames, or aliases. All in all, it made the hunt rather more difficult.

Of course, there were unwitting dupes as well. More than one jealous witch or wizard had accused a neighbor or co-worker of supporting the Dark Lord. And all claims had to be fully investigated, all suspects interrogated under *veritaserum* and many subjected to legilimency. Severus was just glad he was a Healer seconded to SaRACo. He was already hearing rumours from the Healers specializing in the mind that the Ministry legilimances were burning out at unprecedented rate due to overuse of that specialized skill, and spending far too much time in the heads of sadists and madmen.

Slowly though, the world settled back down, although things were of course, slightly different. That winter, it seemed every family in the wizarding world was having a massive gala for the midwinter celebration in their particular religion. Severus and James were of course invited to all of them. After a great deal of consideration and discussion, the Prince-Potters sent out invitations for a Saturnalia Rout, as the Prince family had long hosted, and accepted invitations to the Black's Yule Eve Ball at Grimsthorpe, the Longbottom's High Feast of Geol at Amounderness on solstice day, Old Twelfth Night celebrations with the Shackelbolts on the 31st of December, and the Hogmanay Gala to benefit St. Panteleimon's Hospital on the second of January.

It would be a more than busy enough schedule, especially for someone like Severus who had little patience for making nice despite his skill at dissembling. Still, they did have certain societal obligations, as much as Severus sometimes wished the rest of 'society' would go hang. Severus had from his Investiture in House Prince wanted to make his family proud, and so while the Saturnalia Rout had been cancelled the past few years because of the war, he knew that upholding those sort of traditions would help the family reputation in the future. The same with attending the events hosted by their extended family and friends.

On top of all the society events, there was also the forthcoming Ministry ball, to be held in Severus and James' honour, and during which they would both be presented with the Order of Merlin, First

Class. It was an unlooked for but not unexpected honour, given that they had defeated Voldemort in their own home. No date had yet been given, but in years past when there had been new inductees to the Order of Merlin, the award ceremony, banquet, and ball were held on the first day of the new year by the Julian calendar. All in all, it would make for quite the crowded social calendar through that part of the year.

“Do you think Dumbledore would know anything?” James asked after a while, drawing Severus back to the problem at hand. Horcruxes. Severus fought off a shiver. What a disgusting idea.

“If he did, would he tell us?” Severus returned. Dumbledore had sent a few probing letters, and cornered Severus once in the wizarding district of Edinburgh while he was shopping. Despite that Severus had testified at length about the events of Samhain Eve in front of the Wizengamot, and that James’ testimony had supported his, Dumbledore was evidently dubious, since clearly neither of them were the prophesied savior the Headmaster had expected. Severus couldn’t fathom the old man’s thought processes - it was clear that Dumbledore’s long held prejudices about Slytherins had blinded him to many facts, not least of which was that most of them, while ambitious, were motivated by personal dreams, rather than an overarching thirst for power.

“Probably not,” James admitted with a sigh. Despite that they’d disposed of Voldemort, Dumbledore still hadn’t actually mentioned the prophecy to them, nevermind that it didn’t even seem to apply. By no calendar that Severus could think of was the ninth of January the end of a seventh month, and he’d looked up the birthdays of Alina and Leonora too, since their spirits had been most active in caging Voldemort’s wraith. “He’s been making a pest of himself in the Wizengamot. I don’t know how much longer he’ll be Chief Warlock if he keeps it up.”

“When’s the next election?” Severus asked, grimacing at the reminder of his ignorance on their country’s governance. While he’d learned much, he hadn’t had the training from youth that most heirs received. More importantly, he just didn’t care about much of the political maneuvering.

“Next regular election is two years away,” James said. “But if there’s a vote of no confidence, there will be a special election within a few months after the government being dissolved, and then all bets are off.” Severus nodded, vaguely remembering the bit about special elections and votes of no confidence from his lessons with the Prince elders. He didn’t care much for politics, and had happily allowed himself to forget a great deal of that information once he handed his inherited seats to Remus to vote.

“Who would be elected if there’s a general vote of no confidence?” Severus asked. “Bagnold hasn’t been bad, despite the war, so I wouldn’t mind if we kept her, especially if dissatisfaction allowed someone from the more traditionalist end of the spectrum to gain control.”

“Honestly, I haven’t a clue,” James said. “The traditionalists are getting dragged through the mud at the moment, and I doubt they’ll recover enough to gain any seats during the next regular election, nevermind select the Minister and Chief Warlock, so that means we’ll likely end up with another coalition government,” he said. “Likely the moderates, some of the less radical traditionalists who want to save face, and the progressives will band together to ensure that the more dyed-in-the-wool traditionalists stay out of power.” Severus nodded thoughtfully. “Why, what are you thinking?”

“As much as I despise politics, wouldn’t now, in the wake of our victory, be the time to put all our popularity to bear and ensure that the changes we want to see in the magical world get made?” Severus said, his Slytherin training clear.

“Theoretically yes,” James said. “Although I’m loathe to get any more involved with politics than I already am. It would open up our entire lives to the public. Growing up with us as parents and all

the attention we've garnered, that will be hard enough for the kids." Severus grimaced at that, understanding James' thoughts, as they paralleled his own. According to the goblins who screened their mail, not all of the threatening or sycophantic letters had been aimed at he and James; some had actually laid threats against their children, or alternately fawned over them in a rather disturbing manner.

"Then again," James said, then shrugged. "If not us, then who? The magical world *does* need a lot of help. As someone raised not fully inside the magical world, you have a lot of good perspective on how backwards a lot of things are." He sighed, scrubbing his hand over his face. "I don't know baby. I just don't know." Severus nodded at that, nuzzling against James' muscular chest. He was loathe to be more involved in politics either, which was why Remus was still sitting as proxy for the Prince vote, despite that Severus could easily take the hours off work to attend to Wizengamot business, and that Remus had been very quietly and politely mentioning how much he wished to return to his own research.

The trials and investigations continued for months, well into 1982. Severus and James were careful not to speak at home regarding the legal proceedings, Severus keeping closed mouth about the things he witnessed while dispatched with SaRACo. If anything he saw or reported was relevant he would have to officially testify and it would be unethical to lead James, as a member of the Wizengamot, to the answers or questions ahead of time. Severus' care was necessary, as almost every time he was called on to testify under oath, someone brought up his relationship with James and the potential for them to be somehow colluding to overthrow the Ministry.

If Severus wasn't so practiced at controlling his facial expressions and reactions, the question would have earned a laugh or incredulous look every time. The absolute last thing he wanted was to attain power in the government. Every so often, he pointed that out for those that would accuse him of conspiracy and treason, although mostly the question just got old. If he had been a Ravenclaw, or any other house but Slytherin, no one would have bothered to ask. But those divisions made when they were eleven could hold an inordinate amount of weight for the rest of their lengthy lifespans.

The other good thing, Severus and James agreed, about the attack on Stormholme - besides the ending of open warfare and the death, or rather, defeat of Voldemort - was that it brought Lily and Remus together. Lily had fussed over Remus' injuries, although they weren't terribly significant, and she had clearly read a great deal about treating lycanthropes. The attention she paid Remus evidently won over his reluctance to 'burden' her with his affections.

According to Lily, she and Remus had no formal contract between them, and while Lily was optimistic, she was also well aware she would likely need to pursue Remus, rather than wait for him to court her. Just as well, she said to Severus with a wink and a smile. Remus would likely move too slow for her regardless, Lily claimed, and drive her into pursuing him even if he was more forward with his affections.

Slowly, despite James' antipathy for politicking, he became adept at it. Partially it was self defense. If James didn't want to be trapped into political statements that didn't match his actual beliefs, he had to be proactive about solidifying his platform and elucidating his positions. So he talked often and at length with the more moderate of the Blacks, with the Longbottoms and Shacklebolts and Boneses and other moderate to progressive families, and even with Lucius Malfoy, who was on a lengthy probation but still free as a result of his information trading.

James' generous and gregarious nature was perhaps not made for politicking, but his affability and sincerity translated well. The fame of being Severus' husband helped as well, although James tried not to trade on that. The familial alliances and connections helped, as did the mentorship of old

Lord Black. Moreover, Lucius had become Lord Malfoy after the arrest and conviction of his father Abraxas, who was a major monetary supporter of the Dark Lord.

The former Lord Malfoy had been stripped of his titles, confined to the family estate, and charged a great deal of money as reparations. As no one could prove Abraxas ever took part in muggle baiting or the other more violent actions of the Death Eaters, he was not convicted of those more heavily penalized crimes, and was not sent to Azkaban for his involvement. Lucius, in response, quietly moved his wife and young son to a smaller house on their estates, leaving Abraxas to his own devices.

Remus was perhaps the least helpful of Severus and James' friends when it came to politics, although not through lack of trying. While Remus had long voted the Prince seats for Severus, he was growing tired of politicking himself, and petitioned along with Lily that she take over the proxy for the Prince seat, as Remus wished to return to his own research. It could also be argued that as Lily was a Prince by adoption, she had more right to the seats. Rather to Severus, and even Remus' surprise, Lily took to politics like a duck to water when she was seated as the Prince proxy not long before the Yule recess in 1981, despite her bluff manner and occasional bout of self-righteousness. She was warm and gregarious though, and had the staunch backing of House Black.

Old Lord Arcturus promptly and publicly took Lily under his wing as he had James, and made no secret about the fact that she had birthed his chosen Heir. While Sirius might be mostly reconciled with House Black, both he and Lord Arcturus agreed that he was no fit Heir to the Lordship. Sirius was perfectly happy at the moment with bachelorhood, and had a different date at every social event he attended, a different lover each time James asked. Sirius had always been mercurial though, and most of House Black was quietly pleased he would never be their Lord, as they all knew that he had scorned the training most Heirs received at their father's knees.

By the time the Wizengamot dissolved into crisis and then voted to dismiss the government in early 1982, Lily had quietly built an incredible amount of support and sympathy in both chambers of the legislature. She was the only one surprised when she was voted to create and lead a coalition government to finish out Bagnold's term. Between the Blacks and Prince-Potters and their allies, Lily was able to build just the sort of government that James had predicted. She went through the Ministry like a dose of salts, demanding reviews of loyalty as well as productivity, and cracking down on the corrupt and nepotistic system that had been in place since time immemorial.

Knowing what she did about Severus, James, and their friends' search for knowledge of horcruxes, one of Lily's first orders once she was sworn in as the first muggleborn Minister was to create a team of loyal Unspeakables to research Voldemort and the rituals he had undertaken. Rather different to regular Unspeakables, their reports were published and otherwise made publicly available so the populace knew what was being done to ensure the seemingly indestructible Dark Lord couldn't be resurrected. As the locket horcrux had been brought to light in the initial inquiry, it was a valid fear. Lily also leaned heavily on the Wizengamot, and ensured that James, much to his dismay, became Chief Warlock, the youngest to ever hold the position.

Lily's second act as Minister was to ramrod through legislation in the Wizengamot to find and protect muggleborn and -raised children. Between her popularity as Minister, the support of the progressive to moderate faction James led and his influence as Chief Warlock, and Lucius rallying the more moderate traditionalists, it passed with surprising ease. Riding high on her initial successes, Lily turned her eye to educational reform, and there met her chief obstacle and opponent: Albus Dumbledore.

The aged Headmaster and hero of the previous war had been less than pleased to be deposed from his position as Chief Warlock with the change of governments. Dumbledore managed to keep his

composure when he lost his position at the head of the Wizengamot, but he clearly took umbrage when Lily turned her eye on his personal fief, Hogwarts. The school generally ran with minimal Ministerial interference, but Lily was also able to show very easily that the school was nowhere near capacity, and that student achievement had been dropping for years. There was no hiding either that numerous courses had been removed from the curriculum beginning the same year Armando Dippet died in office and Dumbledore took over, 1957.

Dumbledore argued, and not without cause, that Lily's reformist bent was driven by vengeance over Dumbledore's secret keeping during the war. The argument however largely worked against Dumbledore. Lily, after all, wasn't the only person from whom the aged Headmaster had kept secrets, and many were of the opinion that if Dumbledore had actively supported the beleaguered Ministry instead of forming his own faction of vigilantes, the war would have ended far sooner.

Severus and James were quietly skeptical of claims that Dumbledore supporting the Ministry would have made a difference. As Ministry workers, they knew just how corrupt the government had become during the war. Still, Lily's reforms, even those they were unsure of, seemed worlds ahead of where their world had been under Bagnold and Dumbledore. Between policy and propaganda, Lily even managed to boost the tax base the first year she was in office, by enticing more muggleborn and -raised wixen to stay in the magical world.

That grew not only the tax base though, but the overall economic base as those new citizens of the magical world required housing, durable goods like furniture, and other necessities like groceries. It was during the tumult of her contentious public debates with Dumbledore, and riding the good news of their slightly expanding population that Lily dropped another bombshell. She was pregnant again, and the father was a werewolf.

Although Lily promised she would not abandon general reform and modernization, she focused intently after her revelation on reviewing all legislation affecting lycanthropes. The general public was rather at a loss at first. For years, werewolves had been the enemy, the fearsome predators who might attack at the slightest provocation or on the orders of the Dark Lord.

In her usual bluff manner though, Lily explained, using Severus' extensive research, just what life, and the transformation, was like for the average werewolf. In a show of great personal courage, Remus stepped forward and began giving public talks about living as a werewolf, conveniently leaving out that he was also the Minister's lover, and the father of her unborn child - or rather, children, since her one month checkup had found two embryos - although that was all being kept secret. As Remus was fairly well known as Severus' former proxy and James' friend, as well as a Defense Master and war veteran, he made a very reputable spokesperson for the werewolf community.

There was some animosity of course. Dolores Umbridge, a fairly low ranking assistant in the Improper Use of Magic Office, was absolutely adamant that allowing lycanthropes the full rights enjoyed by other wixen would lead to moral decay and the breakdown of the societal compact. Given Umbridge's known opinions concerning muggleborns, her vociferous denouncement of Lily's policies resulted in her being let go from the Ministry. Umbridge didn't let her termination silence her though, and was soon a regular on some of the scaremongering broadcasts on the wizarding wireless network.

All things said and done, Severus knew that producing an anti-transformation potion would be of immeasurable help to Remus and Lily. So Severus threw himself into his research, staying later and later at the hospital library and laboratories. James despaired of seeing his husband regularly, and Severus' health took a downturn due to lack of sleep and poor eating habits. When Severus' old mentor Aonghus Ross flooded to say he'd found Severus passed out next to an active burner, James



put down his foot.

Slowly Severus' health recovered, although he grumbled about having a curfew like a schoolboy. Despite his grumbling, Severus did understand he needed to ease up a bit. He knew his collapse had scared James and the children, and before his research binge, he'd nearly been healthy enough to consider conceiving again. So Severus did his best to maintain healthy habits, although he was still extremely driven in his research on an anti-transformative potion for werewolves.

It was in that difficult climate that a call came in to SaRACo. There was strong indication that the survivors of the Fenrir Greyback-led werewolf attack the year previous had been found. The tiny village of Llidiardau, near Snowdonia, had been utterly destroyed. Lycanthropy, being a magical disease, killed those exposed to it if they were not magical. Squibs might survive, if they weren't too badly mauled in the original attack, and some claimed that a squib who contracted lycanthropy developed the ability to perform magic.

Of the hamlet of approximately 20, there were two survivors. One, Gladys Griswold, was an elderly squib. The second was her granddaughter, Gloria. After Llidiardau was destroyed, they had disappeared into the woods and hills of Snowdonia, and there had remained in the trackless wilds. Gladys was growing feeble though, and Gloria hungry and desperate for a pack. The young girl's curiosity led them closer and closer to the abandoned settlement, then on to the inhabited town of Bala, where finally they were spotted.

As the closest St. Panteleimon's had to a werewolf expert, as well as an experienced battlefield healer, Severus was the one tapped to join the search team. While he might have preferred staying in research mode, Severus also knew the importance of his presence on the search team. Severus might be terrified of werewolves, but he was also much more likely than most wixen to approach them in an unthreatening manner.

***SAVIOR SEVERUS PRINCE-POTTER TAMES WELSH WOLFGIRL!!!*** The Daily Prophet screamed in three inch letters above the fold the next day. Just beneath was a moving photograph of Severus using his wand to float the too thin form of Gloria Griswold into St. Panteleimon's Hospital on a stretcher. The story was egregiously sensational, while skirting just inside the libel laws, as was the *Prophet's* habit.

Three days later, Gloria Griswold was placed in Ministerial custody on her release from the hospital. Gladys, Gloria's grandmother, hadn't survived the shock of magical transport to the hospital. Remus was first in line to apply for custody of Gloria, as there was no specific law against a werewolf of legal age taking in another werewolf. Plus, Remus argued when asked, they were practically family. Both of them had been turned by the infamous Fenrir Greyback after all.

Rather to the dismay of Severus and the other healers involved in her care, Gloria became an overnight sensation and media darling. She was a petite blonde thing, with a vaguely round face hollowed by months of hunger. She spoke well though, and at nine years of age, had a sort of feral preciousness that endeared her to the public.

There was suddenly another face at the forefront of the werewolf rights movement, and it was a very difficult face to which to say no. No one wanted to be the one to refuse a girl who had escaped the forces of the recently deposed Dark Lord. But if an exception was made to allow *one* known werewolf to attend school, why not the others? And as Remus' living example provided, it was possible for someone suffering from lycanthropy to not only handle the workload, but do well.

Remus' example though, was just the sort of ammunition Lily could make use of. Dumbledore had allowed a werewolf into Hogwarts already, she argued, and no one had known save perhaps the staff. Lily conveniently left out that she had suspected Remus' lycanthropy by fifth year, and that

Remus' roommates had known about it by their second year. Officially though, only the staff had known, and the record clearly indicated that Remus had never harmed anyone save himself. Severus obligingly kept his lip buttoned, and kept working at his anti-transformative potion.

Lily gave birth to her twins, Rhea Daisy Evans and Sylvia Aster Evans, on the second of September 1982. They were beautiful girls with newborn blue eyes and strawberry blonde curls, and James and Severus were immediately named godparents along with the Longbottoms. Less than a month later, Remus convinced Lily to marry him, and so she became Lily Evans-Lupin in mid November after a rather short betrothal. As a wedding gift, Severus and James presented the newly bonded couple with the keys to Stormholme.

As an adopted member of the Prince clan, Severus informed the Lupins, Lily had just as much right to the Princes' ancestral estate as he himself did. Moreover, construction had been finished on the Potter family's ancestral manor of Hartsfield over the summer, and Severus and James had since seen to the warding and decorating of the place. While Stormholme had served and protected them well, it was also the place where the Dark Lord had attempted to kill their son, where Mother Potter and Severus' aunt Alina had died. There were bad memories associated with Hartsfield as well, but they were not so recent. It was in the Cotswolds that the Prince-Potters would raise their children, although the Lupins would always be welcome there.

Little Hadrian was well pleased by the move south. While Stormholme was the only home Hadrian had ever known, Hartsfield boasted new rooms he had not yet toddled through. Cordelia was as yet too young to much know or care about the difference. So long as her beloved parents were there to dote on her, the little girl had no cares in the world. It went without saying that James was pleased to return to his boyhood home, and even more pleased to take Severus in the many bedrooms of another house. It was in one of the many bedrooms of Hartsfield after all, that Severus had conceived a third child while they decorated that summer.

As 1982 gave way to 1983, the usual calendar of society events took up their time. Lily had added another party that Severus and James felt obliged to attend, a Christmas Eve Ball raising money for orphans and indigent families. By that time of the year, Severus was a few months along, and showing his pregnancy quite clearly. His energy was still fairly high though, and while he didn't enjoy socializing with most, he did enjoy seeing his and James' friends in their fancy clothes, and the look on James' face when Severus first modelled his own dress robes, a new set in deep red with bronze detailing. Even better, Kingsley had the same date for all of the functions they saw him at, indicating that this romance might be somewhat serious.

Makeda Adgeh was a lovely Ethiopian witch who Kingsley's cousin Amirah Zabini had met in Italy, and subsequently introduced to Kingsley. They made an excessively handsome couple, both of them tall and dark skinned, and Makeda having an impeccable sense of style. She wore robes of bright Hollandaise cloth in the East African fashion, her hair hidden beneath a coordinating headwrap. Shacklebolt wore coordinating royal purple robes, and could barely take his eyes off his date. James and Severus visited with her and Kingsley for some time, and Severus silently applauded Kingsley. Makeda was clearly intelligent and capable, having a dual Mastery in Defense and Duelling, and being the Ethiopian national duelling champion.

By the time Severus gave birth to his third child on 16 February 1983, a daughter named Leonora Alina Cassiopeia Prince-Potter, Kingsley was clearly head over heels for Miss Adgeh, and she had moved to England and taken the position of Interim Defense Master at Hogwarts. The previous Defense Professor had disappeared without a trace over the holidays, and there was no small amount of grumbling. Quite a few people quietly joined Lily's camp in regards to educational reform at Hogwarts. After all, if Dumbledore couldn't routinely hire a competent Defense Professor, and none of them lasted more than a year, could he really be trusted to run a school?

By the time Hogwarts' spring term ended in June, Lily had secured the Ministry a permanent seat on the Hogwarts Board of Governors, and Dumbledore was on probation. The half-consumed corpse of the Defense Professor who had started the school year had been found in the Forbidden Forest, and there was no hiding that he had died of wounds inflicted by a particularly large Acromantula, creatures which were illegal to import, breed, or raise in Magical Britain without a license - a license that only a few reputable potions suppliers could afford, and none of them were in Scotland.

Experts on the Care of Magical Creatures were soon being escorted through the Forbidden Forest by numerous well trained Hit Wizards. The Centaurs weren't terribly impressed, but by the time the summer was out, hundreds of feral Acromantulas had been killed, and Potions Masters the world over were giddy with joy at the subsequent lowering in price of materials harvested during the hunt including venom, silk, chitin, carapaces, pincers, and eyes. The investigation focused in on Rubeus Hagrid, who was subsequently let go from his position as Groundskeeper.

When Hagrid was brought before the Wizengamot to testify, his involvement in the matter was clear. Also clear though, was the fact that Hagrid's habit of collecting dangerous animals had been ignored by Dumbledore from the time Hagrid had been very young. It was at Dumbledore's insistence that Hagrid had never received more than warnings or a couple detentions for smuggling so called 'werewolf cubs' - the viciously intelligent offspring of transformed lycanthropes and wolves - into the school as a student, or breaking curfew to wrestle trolls in the Forbidden Forest. It had only been when there was a death in the school that Hagrid was expelled.

Further investigation showed though, that the death hadn't been Hagrid's fault. True, he had been keeping an Acromantula in the school. And also true, that in most cases expulsion didn't warrant an investigation by the Ministry. In this specific case though, the Aurors and DMLE surely should have been called. A girl had died, and while she had been 'only' a halfblood, her death ought to have been investigated. Especially as testimony from her ghost revealed that the Acromantula Hagrid had sheltered in the school hadn't been the cause of her death.

At work in the libraries and laboratories at St. Panteleimon's, Severus listened avidly over the wizarding wireless as the mystery was unravelled before the Wizengamot. All recent Hogwarts graduates knew Moaning Myrtle was the youngest, and possibly most irritating ghost at the school. But few if any knew the story of her death. She was quite glad to share though, how she had rushed into the bathroom crying because of horrid Olive Hornsby, and instead of a sink, looked into a pair of great golden eyes.

Further investigations were immediately started. It wasn't until the Wizengamot was able to hire the services of an outside consultant who spoke Parseltongue that they discovered the root of the secret. The bathroom in which Myrtle died contained one of the many entrances to Slytherin's famed Chamber of Secrets. Lily immediately ordered funding for another team of publicly accountable Unspeakables. She, like everyone else, knew as soon as they heard the name Slytherin that this was connected to the late Lord Voldemort, who had been the last living British Parselmouth.

The explorations of Slytherin's Chamber would take the Unspeakables years. Eventually, the outside consultant, Kiana Shirazi, was hired on permanently to the Department of Mysteries. She was later able to publish a great number of highly respected books on Parseltongue as both a spoken and written language, and types of magic which were benefitted by the ability. Proud of her own Persian heritage, she also published a widely read and highly controversial biography of Salazar Slytherin - or rather, Salah Zaahir, who was also partially of Persian origin and had overcome incredible adversity to first travel to Britain and then meet the other Founders.

As the only current member of the Hogwarts staff who had been there when the Chamber of Secrets had been opened and Myrtle Brookwood killed, Dumbledore was roundly castigated. He should have had Hagrid properly investigated. He should have had the death properly investigated. If he had been so suspicious of young Tom Riddle, he should have mentioned it to someone with the authority to actually look in on the boy. When the portrait of Armando Dippet was brought before the Wizengamot, the furore only intensified.

Dippet remembered Riddle as a clever, perhaps too clever, and charming boy. He deeply regretted, he claimed, sending Riddle back repeatedly to the muggle orphanage where he lived when not at Hogwarts. Especially as there had been a war on. Riddle had been terrified of the Blitz, of dying beneath one of the Luftwaffe's bombs. It was not an unreasonable fear, and Dippet had died wondering if he shouldn't have done more for the boy, if he couldn't have done something to avert the creation of Lord Voldemort. His greatest regret in that regard was refusing young Tom Riddle the Defense Against the Dark Arts professorship not long before Dippet's death. After his explosive testimony, the portrait was promptly remanded to the custody of the Unspeakables investigating Voldemort.

The report published by the Unspeakables from Dippet's information was scathing. Numerous well respected names were dragged into the mud. Dippet after all had nothing to lose, and could not be coerced. He was dead, his legacy already tarnished by the death during his tenure as Headmaster. While there were always dangers inherent in magic, the death of a school child was a rare occurrence. *The Daily Prophet* had a field day raking up the muck, and by July the Board of Governors had more than enough cause to suspend Dumbledore indefinitely based on Dippet's claims of what he had witnessed after the Headmaster was installed.

Without a true Head, and with evidence of dangerous beasts and a former future Dark Lord roaming the halls of Hogwarts, Lily had plenty of public support when she demanded that teams from Gringotts be sent in, comprised of curse breakers and ward specialists. The school was inspected from top to bottom, the Unspeakables assigned to the Chamber of Secrets still mapping the miles of tunnels beneath and within the walls of Hogwarts, and further teams combing the rest of the school. After consultation with Sirius and Remus, James volunteered the map that they had created while students, and the Unspeakables happily interviewed Remus for days on end about the enchantments of the remarkable document.

The ultimate justification of Lily's slash and burn tactics came when the Unspeakables who had emptied the mysterious 'Room of Requirement' reported that they had found another horcrux within the school itself. With that, the until that point newly named 'Interim' Headmaster was given the full support of the Board of Governors, and Dumbledore was permanently removed in disgrace. Quietly, people began distancing themselves from the former Headmaster. Just as importantly, in James' opinion, Makeda Adgeh was asked to stay on permanently as Defense Mistress, and her relationship with Kingsley could continue more easily.

When Hogwarts started back up again in September of 1983, it was with new wards, a new Headmaster, and an array of new professors and courses. Not everyone was happy of course. Even with the slow and quiet, and then louder and more public campaign that Lily and the Prince-Potters had waged against Dumbledore, he still had his devoted followers. For the most part though, the school was cleaner and safer than it had been in generations.

Whenever James saw his cousin, he teased Kingsley mercilessly. Having found the joy of a loving partner himself, James wished to spread that joy around a bit. Kingsley took the ribbing with remarkable grace. It was hard to argue against James' teasing after all, when he really was quite taken with Makeda. She was everything he could want in a partner, clever and beautiful and strong willed. The trick would be finding a compromise, as they were both rather career oriented people.

## Chapter End Notes

I'm not overly thrilled with the chapter, but there it is. I couldn't tell if further editing was helping any more.

So yes, in this AU, Harry is not a horcrux, but yes, they do exist. Assuming that Nagini becomes a horcrux when Voldemort is in spirit form or in the baby-Voldy-golum or maybe even later in canon, I would say there are five horcruxes at this point. The locket, which Sirius provides, the diary, which this iteration of Lucius would be glad to be rid of, and presumably someone in the Black family inherits Bellatrix's vaults after her death, leading to the discovery of the cup horcrux. That leaves the ring and the tiara for the Unspeakables.

I'm so mean to Hagrid. I love Hagrid, but he's really not the best choice for that position, not even before he starts teaching.

*Reperio* is (one of) the Latin verb(s) 'to find,' in this case used to find material in an enchanted book that functions as a library catalogue.

Senebkay is a real dude, although I forget how I heard about him.

## Epilogue: Nineteen Years Later

### Chapter Notes

Partly this is to honour (or gently mock) canon. Partly this is because lazy author is lazy and doesn't want to write the day to day life of the next however many years, but still wants to emphasize that Severus and James have a long and happy life together, and enough kids to field their own quidditch team.

Also, it was unintentional that I'd be posting the last bit on Harry's birthday, but Happy Birthday Harry Potter.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was the first of September, 2002. James Prince-Potter, his beloved spouse Severus Prince-Potter, and their children stood on Platform 9 3/4 at King's Cross Station, awaiting the Hogwarts Express. Their eldest, Hadrian, was 22. The others, Cordelia, 21; Leonora, 19; Edmund, 17; Sebastian, 16; the twins Dylan and Lleu, 15; Gaius, 13; and Cosima, 'almost 12,' were gathered around them. All the children were neatly dressed, the four eldest in simple but well made robes, the younger five in their Hogwarts Uniforms. This year would be Cosima's first year going away to school, as she had turned 11 late in the previous November, after the cutoff date for Hogwarts attendance.

As Severus and James had once joked, they had enough children to mount their own quidditch team. The only other family with near as many children was the Weasleys, although all of them were finished with Hogwarts until the next generation arrived. Hadrian, the eldest of the Prince-Potter children, had been yearmates with the second-youngest of his generation of Weasleys, Ronald, and while they hadn't been enemies, they hadn't been terribly friendly either.

The Weasleys, despite being of Black blood, flouted most pureblood traditions, and had once been staunch allies of Albus Dumbledore. The former Headmaster had lost the last shred of respectability to his name some years ago though, when the prison memoirs of Gellert Grindelwald, ghostwritten by Rita Skeeter, had been published, and the long ago affair between the Dark wizard and Dumbledore became widely known.

It had been quite the coup for Skeeter, who had previously been seen as little more than a gossip-sliding and scandal-mongering annoyance. Dumbledore, who had been suspended from the position of Headmaster of Hogwarts not long after Lily Evans-Lupin became Minister, was unlikely to ever hold public office or any other position of trust again. These days, few would admit to having supported him in any way, but given the lengthy lives of magical folk, the former allegiances of families like the Weasleys would be remembered for years to come.

The extended family of the Prince-Potters made up of the Lupins, the Longbottoms, and the Shacklebolts were nearby as well. Lily Evans-Lupin was still Minister of Magic, and still enjoying an enormous amount of popularity. Her eldest son, Antares Black, was one of Hadrian Prince-Potter's best friends, along with Neville Longbottom. In truth, the three of them were almost like siblings. Hadrian was the Hufflepuff of the lot, intransigently loyal to his friends and family. Neville was a Gryffindor, and Antares a Ravenclaw, although all three had Slytherin moments. Their other close friends, Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott, were a Gryffindor and a Hufflepuff respectively, and Hannah was being courted by Neville, although they had chosen one another

rather than having the match made for them.

Antares' adopted sister Gloria Griswold-Lupin, 28, and his younger half siblings, Rhea and Sylvia Lupin, aged 19; Artemisia, 17; Theodore, 14; and Evan, 10, were waving off only two of their number to Hogwarts this year. Artemisia, a Ravenclaw, would be Head Girl. She had already secured a job for after graduation in the Ministry funded laboratory that brewed the anti-transformation potion Severus created some years previous.

Rhea and Sylvia, being the most adventurous of the family, were only briefly in town, and would soon be heading back to Turkey, where they were working on a book on the ancient magics of the fabled Amazon tribes. Neville's eldest younger sibling, Augustina, was 20, but the youngest Longbottom, Alric, was only 16, and would be headed off to Hogwarts, leaving Neville, Augustina, and their sister Edith, who was 18, behind. Alric would be joined by the three eldest Shacklebolt children - his best friend Dejen, also 16, and Dejen's twin sister Desta, as well as their 13 year old sister, Ime.

Susan Bones had no siblings, but once things had settled down after the defeat of Voldemort, her Aunt Amelia had allowed her former suitor Rufus Scrimgeour to pay her court once more, and they had been married for eleven years now. Their children were all too young for Hogwarts, and Hannah, who was Susan's maternal cousin, would be taking up duties as their governess, to teach them the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, magical theory, herbology and potions ingredient preparation. It was a fairly common occupation among 'young women of good family' who were not yet ready to marry.

Hannah had the additional qualification of a muggle teaching certification, a rare enough thing to make her expertise highly sought after. She hoped to open a small school at the Longbottom's estate of Amounderness once she and Neville bonded - there were now enough magical children that such an operation seemed a wise idea. Susan had joined the DMLE under her aunt and uncle's supervision, although she had won the place with her talents and intelligence rather than her blood and connections.

Hadrian had dithered for a long time whether or not to pursue a career as an Auror. He had been trained from a young age in the duties of an Heir, but he knew that James would be Chief Warlock and Lord Potter for many years yet. James and Severus and their cohort were only in their early forties, and wixen often lived into their second century. Hadrian could easily have a lengthy career before he took over the Potter vote in the Wizengamot. It had already been arranged that the Prince Lordship would continue through the Lupin family, who had not previously held a seat in the Wizengamot, and little Evan was already in training as Heir Prince, and would likely take that name when he took over the seat, as his older brother Theodore was Heir to the Lupin name.

Eventually, Hadrian had determined that he, like Severus, preferred research to investigating crime. He had become an Unspeakable since graduating Hogwarts, and enjoyed the career immensely. Neville, to no one's surprise, had inherited his mother's love of herbology along with her warm personality and indomitable spirit. She had cultivated Neville's green thumb carefully, and he was now her apprentice and assistant in the Longbottom Leaf enterprise.

While the Longbottoms were still best known for their potent strain of marijuana, they had worked to improve a number of other plants as well. Material harvested from their hothouses and fields were highly sought after by Potions Masters, and Severus always had first pick of the lot. The greenhouses at the Prince-Potter home of Hartsfield even had a few plants grown from Longbottom cuttings or seed. Augustina handled the business end of the operation, as she had a mind that found magic in numbers. Edith had nothing to do with the family business what-so-ever - she had followed her father's footsteps and was in the Auror Training Program.

Antares had become a curse breaker for Gringotts. Growing up in House Black, disarming minor wards, hexes, and jinxes was practically a family pastime. He had firmly decided on curse breaking as a career as a 15 year old, when he discovered Tom Riddle's old diary - and a horcrux - in the belongings that Abraxas Malfoy passed on to Lucius at his death. Lucius had wisely called in the Unspeakables to go through the rest of the items mouldering in Ermingard, where Abraxas had spent the last years of his life.

Similar precautions had been taken when at 17, Antares inherited the responsibility for House Black from his great-grandfather Arcturus, including the vaults that had once belonged to Bellatrix Black Lestranger - which had included another horcrux. Antares was not much envied among their friend group for having had the luck to find two horcruxes - it made his mother rather overprotective. Thankfully, through trial and error on the locket and diadem horcrux the Unspeakables had been able to first, determine a mode of destruction for the foul artifacts. *Fiendfyre*, it seemed, really was an infernal spell - it burned the soul right out of the horcruxes, although it meant that the artifacts themselves were also utterly destroyed.

There had been some initial upset over the idea of destroying Ravenclaw's famed diadem or Slytherin's locket. But eventually, pragmatism won out. While yes, it was unfortunate that they would lose these valuable Founders artifacts, it was much more important to ensure that Voldemort could *never* be resurrected. So the diadem and locket had been destroyed. The diary and goblet had been destroyed as well, once found, although not before one of the Unspeakables rather ingeniously used the chalice, which was the less adversarial of the pair, to scry for other horcruxes or malignancies tied to the soul or magic of Tom Riddle.

The Unspeakables had, in short order, found and destroyed both an ancient ring with the symbol of the Deathly Hallows etched into it, and a massive, poisonous serpent that was tied to Riddle's magic, although not his soul. A familiar that no one had known of. There were a few other suspicious returns as well, spawning further work for the Unspeakables. One ended up being an ocean cave full of *inferi*, which also met their end through *fiendfyre*. Thankfully though, such terrors were few and far between.

The past nineteen years since Lily Evans-Lupin took office had been good to the Prince-Potters and their allies, and more widely to the magical world of Britain. While Lily was not universally adored as Minister, it was a close thing. Most of those who disliked her and her policies were purebloods from Old Families, but even they, over time, had come to grudgingly respect Lily. While she retained her bluff, personable manner, she had also learned a certain amount of canniness that the Old Families admired.

It helped too, that when Lily had learned of DNA and the advances in the decoding of the human genome, she had encouraged the Unspeakables to study biology and genetics, and her and Severus' long ago theory that all muggleborns were descended from either squibs or magical beings was now proven almost beyond the shadow of a doubt. That, along with her educational reforms which had included teaching those raised in the muggle world about wizarding customs, and fostering magical children in the houses of the Old Families, allowing those families the feeling of importance and beneficence in passing on their traditions.

More importantly to James and Severus, Lily's insistence in researching Tom Riddle and his horcruxes had resulted in the hunting out and destruction of every minute scrap of Voldemort's magic and soul, and the deposed Dark Lord could never be resurrected to harm their family. Severus had helped the Unspeakables in the research on the two horcruxes his nephew Antares had found, as at that time he had already perfected his anti-transformative potion for lycanthropes. Remus hadn't transformed in nearly 14 years. Even better, the Lupin children were not werewolves, but something that the British wizarding world hadn't ever formally acknowledged



before.

Rhea and Sylvia Lupin had been watched closely as children, and were now widely accepted as not werewolves, but lycans. They could transform into lupine forms, but the shift was entirely at will, not governed by the moon, and they maintained their sanity and human intelligence throughout. Quite a few other lycans had come forward in Britain once it was safe to do so, and it was soon clear that other magical countries had known about this difference for quite some time. Only the unreasoning hatred of werewolves in magical Britain had kept the knowledge from being disseminated.

“So, think they’ll find any more Blacks this year?” Severus asked quietly, shooting a sly, teasing look up at his husband. James huffed softly in amusement. While Sirius Black had never married, quite a few of his children had attended Hogwarts. At last count, James knew of a solid half dozen of them, all of Hogwarts age, and none of them officially recognized by House Black. Sirius set up generous trust vaults for each as he became aware of them, but it was unlikely he’d ever change his ways. He enjoyed roaring about in his motorcycle and drinking in muggle pubs, pulling attractive young women.

As Sirius would never be Lord Black, it was unlikely they would be legitimized unless Antares decided to recognize his many cousins and welcome them into the family when he was fully Invested into the Lordship at 25. While the Black family had grown more progressive as time passed, Antares knew well that he would have to behave in a certain manner in public at all times to distance himself from both the criminal activities of his father and cousins, and the socially frowned upon pastimes of his uncle Sirius.

“It’s likely,” James admitted. “At least he provides for all of them once we bring it to his attention.” Severus laughed softly at that, shaking his head. He and Sirius got on better than they once had, but mostly they just put up with one another on James’ account. They’d tried at first to be friendlier to one another, for James’ sake since they each loved him in their own way, but their personalities just didn’t mesh.

Sirius, despite his long years of service as an Auror, still saw little use for caution. Severus, always cautious and more reserved, found such unmitigated enthusiasm rather exhausting when it was exhibited by anyone other than his husband, best friend, or children, and they had all learned to rein themselves in a bit around Severus over the years unless they wanted a dark look or a telling off. This year, Sirius hadn’t joined them for the annual send off, although that wasn’t unusual.

Despite that most Ministry workers got September first off, there was always a cadre of Aurors on duty. Those who were unmarried - like Sirius - were usually the first assigned to duty on holidays, and for the magical world, the first of September was a holiday, if a casual one. A day of greeting friends and family as they gathered to send their children off to be trained in the magical arts. Some of the Aurors on duty were standing guard today in the station, on both sides of the divider. Sirius, being somewhat more senior, was back at the DMLE, ‘supervising.’

Sirius and James were fully reconciled these days, although they weren’t as close as men as they had been as boys. In the end, they had simply developed different interests as they grew up. James was at heart a family man, and while he still thought of Sirius as his chosen brother, Severus and their children would always come first. While Sirius too was devoted to his family, it was his family of choice that garnered his greatest loyalty, and that was the Aurors and DMLE. There was also the undeniable fact that Sirius was still more interested in going out and having fun, and scandalizing the more circumspect members of British magical society, including his family of birth, than having a quiet night in with friends.

“For all he derides House Black, the importance of family is well ingrained,” Severus said with a wry smile, knowing James would understand. James nodded, smiling slightly. Sirius loved his children, if from a distance, and ensured they were properly taken care of even if he was leery of becoming too involved with their lives. Severus tightened his hold on James’ arm, and leaned into the taller wizard slightly.

The past 19 years had been kind to both Severus and James, in other ways than the health and number of their beloved children. Both had gained some weight, Severus’ settling on his hips and thighs, James’ at his midsection. They still loved one another deeply, and often embarrassed their children with public displays of affection.

Now that most of the Prince-Potter children were somewhat grown, Severus and James went on date nights at least once a month in the muggle world, taking care not to act like they were on a date to avoid drawing undue attention. Although, things were changing in the muggle world as well, and it was becoming more common for them to see two men together who were clearly in a romantic relationship. It pleased Severus and James to see that growing acceptance; they both knew that with ever advancing muggle technology, the wizarding world would not indefinitely remain a secret. Anything that indicated an increase of tolerance seemed like a small victory.

Lily had begun planning for that future though, and with magical Britain prospering unlike any period in recent history, they felt prepared. They weren’t ready yet, but they would be. The Prince, Potter, Lupin, Black, Longbottom, Shackbolt, and even Malfoy legacies were all secure. The magical population was growing, and with the testing of bloodlines in newcomers to the magical world, quite a few families previously thought extinct had been revived.

If someone had asked Severus, or even James, at 17 if all these things were possible, neither would have dared dream of such happiness. But the Dark Lord was long defeated, and with Lily’s determination and drive, would never return. With the help of Lucius Malfoy, the long held resentments of the traditionalists were being alleviated such that it would be difficult for any rising Dark Lord to gain a foothold and power base from that population. Muggleborn wixen and magical beings and creatures were seeing opportunities in the magical world that had been denied to them for generations, lessening probability of sectarian violence from them. Their children dreamed bigger than Severus ever would have dared, and he loved them all the more for it. All was well.

## Chapter End Notes

Right, well, that’s all of it. Sorry for the lazy last chapter / epilogue, but I just wanted to be done, and I felt I’d accomplished about all I wanted to in this particular AU, which was to give Severus a happier ending and see if I could write James/Severus, as they aren’t my usual pairing, what with James canonically being one of Severus’ abusers, and also rather obsessed with Lily.

There’s a very slim chance I’ll write a vignette or two of the children growing up or some such fluff, but if I do they’ll be a different story from *Hart and Hind*. Thanks to all of you who read, left kudos, or commented. Although most of the story was written before I began posting, your encouragement gave me the needed boost to finish. This method of motivation seems to work on me, so now I need to decide which of my other many, *many* works in progress to apply it to :)

## End Notes

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